

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

MAY, 1978

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NIGHT OF THE WHITE HUNTER

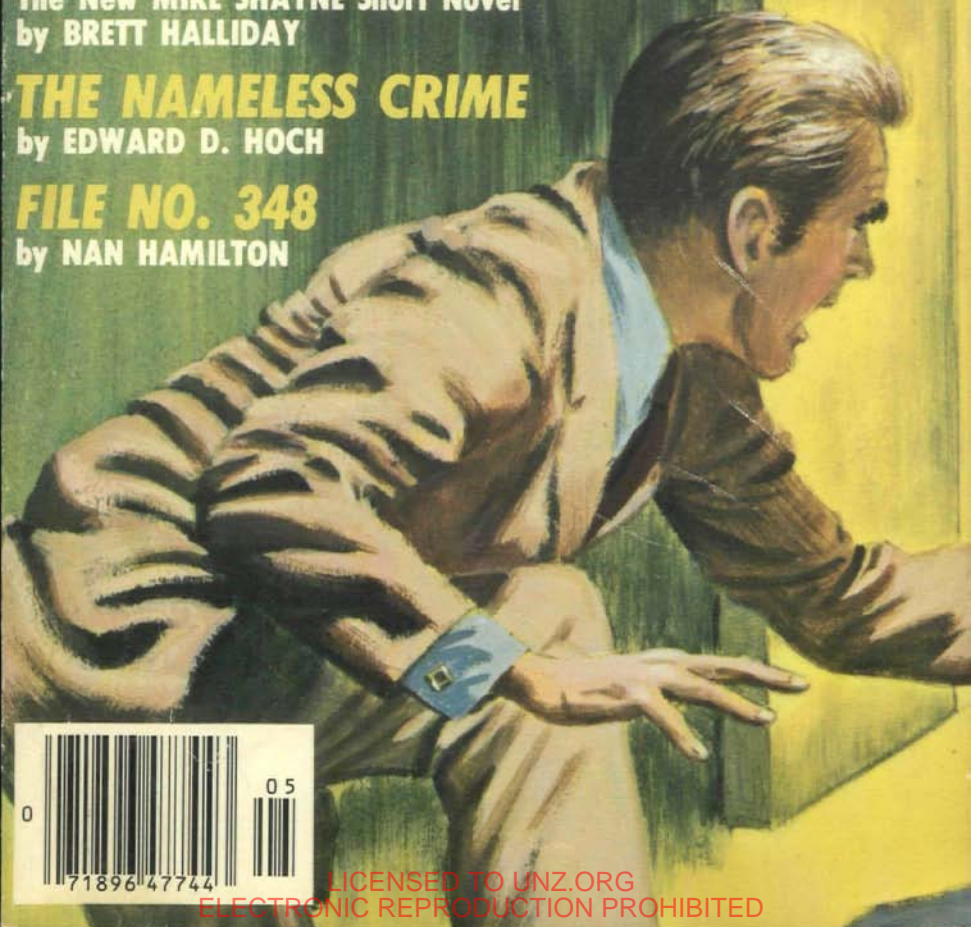
The New MIKE SHAYNE Short Novel
by **BRETT HALLIDAY**

THE NAMELESS CRIME

by **EDWARD D. HOCH**

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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

MAY, 1978
VOL. 42, NO. 5

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

NIGHT OF THE WHITE HUNTER

by BRETT HALLIDAY

The fanatical killer made one big mistake. He fired a shot at the Miami redhead to warn him off the case. After that, wild horses couldn't have kept him out of it. 3 to 44

TWO FINE NEW NOVELETS

THE NAMELESS CRIME

Edward D. Hoch 45

WITHIN THE FAMILY

Jack Leavitt 83

SIX NEW SHORT STORIES

THE GREEDY LANDLORD

Marilyn Whiteside 61

FILE NO. 348

Nan Hamilton 71

GOLDFISH BOWL

Nick O'Donohoe 99

THE PRO

Robert H. Curtis 114

BACKSEAT BLUES

R. G. Hallawell 117

ANNIE

R. Tuttle 123

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Night of the White Hunter

by BRETT HALLIDAY

The case opened for Mike Shayne with a bullet through one of his windows that missed his head by inches. Bad enough — but worse when he discovered that the near-miss was deliberate.

MIKE SHAYNE WAS in-between assignments, taking things easy in his hotel suite the night the shot came smashing through his window. It was a warm, end-of-summer night and the big redhead was wearing only his pajama bottoms as he drowsed over a novel in his easy chair by the window.

The bullet made no sound. Shayne became aware of being shot at only when the window glass suddenly exploded inward, sending glass across the room. The bullet smashed a table lamp just beyond, before burying itself

into the baseboard behind it.

The big redhead's reflexes worked instantaneously. He was out of the chair and hugging the floor before the last of the broken glass hit the carpet. He rolled away from the window, then lay flat on his stomach, waiting. Blood oozed from a tiny cut on his cheek caused by flying glass. He waited for a long, tense moment, but no other shot came through what was left of the lower window pane.

Shock and an instinctive sense of self preservation had been his

first reaction; now anger began to simmer in the big private investigator as he bellied his way to the wall beside the window, then lunged to his feet. He pressed back against the wall, close to the edge of the window drapes.

It was well past midnight. Below him the city still stirred, but at a diminished pace. He heard a car honk impatiently somewhere, then cut off. Overhead a 747 droned on its way north.

The detective inched closer to the shattered window. He was facing the Boulevard and he knew there was no building directly across from him from which a rifleman could sight in on his window.

Where had the shot come from?

Shayne turned his attention to the smashed lamp and the bullet hole in the baseboard beyond. The angle of the shot seemed to indicate that the rifleman had fired from a slightly higher elevation.

The phone rang, interrupting Shayne's grim speculations. Mike Shayne eyed it. His big, muscular body was still tensed. Miami's ace private investigator did not take lightly to being shot at. The phone kept ringing. Shayne jerked the curtains across the shattered window, then crossed quickly to the phone. He picked it up in one quick sweep and stepped out of line with the window.

"Yeah?" the redhead said, his voice holding an edged growl.

"Am I keeping you awake,

the voice asked?"

The big detective's teeth ground. "Who are you?"

The caller's voice was low, hoarse, as though there was something wrong with his vocal cords. Or else he was trying hard to disguise it.

The man chuckled. It sounded grotesque. "Doesn't matter who I am. I just called to tell you that that shot a couple of minutes ago was just a warning —"

"Damn you!" Shayne cut him off grimly. "Are you crazy? Who are you?"

The voice changed, took on a deadly edge. "Mind your tongue, Shayne! I told you that shot was a warning. I could have blown your head off, if I had wanted to. And next time I will, if you don't do what I tell you!"

"Do I know you?" Shayne asked grimly.

"No." The man's voice was cool. "I don't know you, either, except by reputation."

Christ! Shayne thought, *another nut with a gun!* They seemed to be crawling out of the woodwork these days.

"All right," the big redhead said, humoring the man. "What do you suggest I do?"

"That's better," the hoarse voice replied. "I want you to turn down a client. A girl named Milly Hansen. Tell her to get lost."

Shayne's Irish temper boiled over. "You *are* crazy!" he snarled. "I don't have a client by

that name. I don't even know anyone named Milly Hansen —"

"You will, Shayne . . . you will," the voice cut in. There was a long pause and Shayne could hear the man's breathing on the other end of the line. "She's going to die," the man said, breaking his silence. "If you want to stay alive, stay out of it!"

There was a sharp click as the man slammed his receiver down.

Shayne stared at his phone for a long moment before hanging up. He tried to think of someone who might be gunning for him, but could not come up with anyone who wasn't still serving time behind prison bars. Besides, the man had said he didn't know Shayne.

Has to be some psycho, getting his kicks firing at people, Shayne thought grimly. The big redhead had worked closely enough with the Miami police over the years to read the signs . . . late summer doldrums seemed to bring out the worst in some people.

But the shot had been damned close, and he had to admit he was still shaken by the close call.

He went into his bathroom, washed the blood from small cuts on his face and hands, then came back and surveyed the broken glass on his carpet.

He'd inform the hotel manager in the morning, explain it was an accident, have the window glass repaired. No sense in calling Chief Gentry on this. The Miami

police had enough trouble on their hands.

But the shot still bothered Shayne. He went to the window, edged the curtain aside, stared out across the night. The only vantage point from which the rifleman could have had a clean shot at his window was from the roof of a building at least a quarter of a mile away.

It was a hell of a long shot, even more difficult in the dark. The man must have used a night 'scope, but even so Shayne couldn't have been more than a vague silhouette in his cross sights.

Yet he knew it was Mike Shayne he was shooting at!

A faint chill went down the private investigator's back. Someone he didn't know, out there in the night, gunning for him — it was not a pleasant thought.

Shayne picked up the shattered glass from the carpet as best he could, downed a double shot of brandy and went to bed.

II

MIKE SHAYNE FELT better in the morning. He showered, dressed, took a look from his shattered window at the distant building from which the shot must have come. It was a clear, warm day, the sun's rays slanting against the buildings. Below him, traffic was beginning to clog the city streets as people went to

work in their automobiles.

He crossed to the far wall, crouched to examine the bullet hole in the baseboard. He took out a pocket knife, cut around the hole, finally dug the hunk of lead out. There was a firewall behind the baseboard and the bullet had flattened against it. Shayne held it in his open palm, trying to judge its caliber. It seemed an odd size, probably from some foreign make.

He dropped the bullet into his pocket, took the elevator down to the first floor, stopped in at the manager's office. Clay Overton didn't ask questions. Shayne was a long-time tenant. He'd have the maintenance man up right away to fix the window.

"Have him check the baseboard in the south wall," the big red-head said. "I think we have mice."

He grinned at the manager's startled look, waved, went out.

Shayne drove to a nearby coffee shop, had coffee, eggs and bacon. The morning paper headlined the drought in the western states and went on to suggest that higher prices for Florida's fruit and produce could be expected. There was also the usual quota of killings, of bodies found slashed to death or shot.

In many ways, Shayne reflected over his coffee, a big city was like a jungle inhabited by predators and prey. Death stalked the narrow, littered alleys, waited on

the highways, crouched in darkened hallways of shabby hotels and rundown ghetto homes. Nor was it a stranger to the affluent bedrooms of Bal Harbour, or the glittering waterholes of the Yacht Club and the swanky hotel bars along Collins Avenue in Miami Beach.

This was Mike Shayne's habitat . . . sprawling Miami and its environs. Here he hunted the predators who preyed on the weak and the innocent. But last night he had become the hunted.

Someone had come close to killing him — someone who had tracked him, knew where he lived, on which floor, even to the window of his hotel suite. The man had gone to a lot of trouble for this, but the reason escaped the ace private investigator. He didn't know anyone named Milly Hansen. It had to be a mistake.

He finished his coffee, put money down to cover his check and went outside. It took him fifteen minutes to drive to his office on East Flagler street.

Lucy was going through the morning mail when Shayne entered. She looked trim, fresh and, as always, glad to see him.

"Morning, Michael," she greeted. Then she noticed the small cuts on his face and concern clouded her features.

"Your face, Michael — what happened?"

"Cut myself shaving." He chuckled her under her chin.

"Nothing for you to worry about." He glanced at the small stack of mail on Lucy's desk. "Anything good?"

"A letter from your cousin in Chicago," she replied.

Shayne was on his way to his inner office. He turned. "Cousin? I don't have a cousin in Chicago."

"I know," Lucy said sweetly. She held up a three-by-five color print of a buxom blonde in scanty attire with Playboy bunny ears and cottontail.

Shayne took the picture from Lucy and scowled at the writing scrawled across it: *Your loving cousin, Fran.*

"Doesn't look like you a bit," Lucy said. She was eyeing the big redhead, a thin smile on her lips.

Shayne plucked a stiff invitational card from the square envelope Lucy held out to him. A gold key fell out. The engraved card gave Shayne a complimentary life membership in the Chicago Playboy Club.

Shayne tossed it on the desk. "Any calls?"

Lucy shook her head. "But you have a client. She's waiting for you in your office."

Shayne nodded.

"About your cousin," Lucy said, "what shall I do with her picture?"

"Send it back to Henderson," Shayne growled. Henderson was an old friend, and things like this were his idea of a joke.

Shayne went into his office,

eyed the young woman sitting in a chair by his desk. She had been thumbing through an old police journal, but she turned now as the big redhead entered, a small smile on her exquisitely bowed lips.

"Mr. Shayne?"

Mike nodded. Late twenties, he judged. And beautiful enough to take first prize in most beauty contests. Her hair was raven black, her skin dusky, her eyes slightly slanted, indicating a Eurasian mixture. Her features were delicate, her body slim, supple, deceptively strong.

She stood up, extended a hand decorated by an odd-looking ring. "I'm Millicent Hansen."

Shayne took her hand, found her grip firm but not masculine. He frowned, hiding the shock in his tone. "Milly Hansen?"

"Yes," she said. Her eyes were black with dancing amber glints in them. She looked faintly puzzled. "Have we met before?"

Shayne plucked at his left earlobe as he went around his desk, sat down. "No," he replied. "I don't think so. But I have heard the name lately."

"Oh?" She seated herself at Shayne's casual wave. "It must be you've heard of my father." She was clutching a small, cream-colored leather purse in her lap, and though she tried to hide it, she was evidently nervous. "Gordon Hansen?"

Shayne shook his head.

"The Hansen Museum then?"

Milly continued. "East African antiquities?"

Shayne leaned forward now, nodded. "Of course." It was a private museum, founded some years ago, a few miles south off Route One. He frowned, added, "If I remember the interview in the Miami *Daily News*, your father was one of the last of the old white hunters."

Milly sighed softly. "Newspapermen are such exaggerators, aren't they?"

"But your father was a white hunter, wasn't he?"

"Oh, yes. In the days when much of Africa was still largely unknown. Before the time of the air-conditioned land-rover and chilled champagne for dinner." She shook her head.

"He was fresh out of college, when he shipped aboard a freighter, jumped ship at Mombasa and signed up with an old safari outfit in Nairobi." Her smile had a touch of sadness. "All this my mother told me before she died. She was a Eurasian, and they met in Mombasa. She never left Africa."

Shayne scratched the tip of his nose. He was mildly interested, but at the moment he could not see how this involved him. He dug out a pack of cigarets, held it up, asked: "Do you mind?" and when she shook her head, he lighted up.

"Why did you come to see me?" he inquired.

She took a folded piece of note-paper from her bag, handed it to him across his desk. "This is the third one. I destroyed the other two."

The big redhead glanced at the note. It was on good bond, with a sketch of a lion charging out of the brush at a hunter levelling a rifle. The note read, "I want the Crown of Orpheus which your father stole from me. I warned you I'd kill for it. You chose to ignore me. The next to die will be someone much closer to you."

Shayne frowned. The writing was cramped, barely legible. It was unsigned.

"I discounted the first two," Milly said. "The museum receives many crank letters during the year. But yesterday my dog, Brutus, was shot." Her lips trembled for a moment before her jaw firmed. "For no reason."

Shayne reread the note. "The Crown of Orpheus? What is it?"

"I don't know." The young woman stood up, clutching her bag. She didn't look at Shayne. "There's nothing in the museum by that name. That's why I ignored the first two letters."

"I suggest you go to the police," Shayne said.

"I have," Milly responded quickly. "They didn't take it seriously. A crank note." She looked at Shayne across the desk. "I'm not easily frightened, Mr. Shayne. But I am now."

"There's someone out there

who's quite mad . . . someone ready to kill. Like some wounded animal lying in the brush, hurt, angry, ready to pounce on the first unlucky person who comes along. He says he wants the Crown of Orpheus from me. I don't know what he's talking about. I know I don't have it. But I am afraid of what he will do."

Shayne knew exactly what she meant. There was no doubt now that the man who had taken a shot at him last night was the man who had written this note.

"I live on a trust fund of fifteen thousand a year," Milly said. "I also get paid a minor wage working at the museum. I can afford to pay for your services, if you're not too expensive, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne nodded. The man who called him last night had laid down a challenge the big redhead could not ignore.

"I want to make a few inquiries first," he said. "But I will want to see you this afternoon. You will be at the museum?"

"Yes."

He walked her to the door. "I'll see what I can find out about this Crown of Orpheus — if there is such an antiquity."

III

"GET ME PROFESSOR Harris on the phone," Shayne instructed Lucy after Milly Hansen had gone. Harris was an old friend, teaching

criminal law at the University of Miami.

Professor Harris came on the line a few minutes later. He was short, slight, with a voice that sounded as though it came from a much bigger man. It was deep, crisp and carried authority.

"Yeah . . . Mike?"

"I need an introduction to one of your faculty colleagues. Dr. James Joyner, African studies."

"Jimmy? Sure. What's up, Mike?"

"Tell you when I see you," Shayne replied. He hung up, went into the outer office. Lucy was at her desk. She held up an envelope. It was watercolor pink and smelled of jasmine.

"Came by in special messenger," she said.

Shayne frowned. "What is it?"

"An invitation to speak before the local chapter of the NOW group." Lucy smiled. "They want your point of view on ERA and the Gay Liberation Movement."

"Christ!" Shayne exploded. "I'll give them my point of view —" He caught himself, shrugged. "Look, Lucy, I really haven't time to honor their invitation."

Lucy nodded. "Of course. I'll mail them a polite refusal."

"Yeah, do that," the big redhead said. He started for the door, turned. "I'm going out to the University. Then to the Gordon Hansen Museum. You can reach me at either place, if something

urgent comes in."

Lucy made a notation on her pad.

Shayne hesitated, his hand on the door knob. "And . . . about that woman's group talk . . . hold off on that reply."

Lucy showed her surprise. "You're thinking of going?"

Shayne grinned. "I'm keeping my options open."

Professor Joyner was a big black man with an infectious laugh and tight-curved iron-gray hair. He was in his office when the detective was ushered in by his secretary, a comely, light-skinned black woman.

"Mike Shayne?" Joyner said, rising from behind his desk and coming around it to meet the Miami redhead. He extended a big hand. "I've been looking forward to meeting you."

Shayne liked the man immediately. He was at ease, sure of himself. He was considered one of the top authorities on Africana.

"Ed Harris said you have something bothering you," Joyner said. "Can I be of help?"

"Hopefully, yes," Shayne replied.

Joyner waved Shayne to a chair, went back to his own behind his desk. "Shoot," he said genially.

"For starters," the big redhead began, "what do you know about the Gordon Hansen Museum?"

Joyner frowned as he picked up his pipe, uncapped his humidor. "I've been there. They have some

interesting pieces. But a lot of it is what any African tourist could pick up." He started to thumb tobacco into his pipe bowl. "Why?"

"I'll explain later," the big redhead said. "My next question is 'What do you know about the Crown of Orpheus?'"

Joyner froze, a strange expression on his face. Then he leaned back, lighted up.

"You've surprised me, Shayne. I didn't think there were more than four or five men in the country who knew anything about the Crown of Orpheus."

"There is such an antiquity?"

Joyner shrugged. "We're not sure," he replied. He puffed thoughtfully on his pipe. "There are conflicting stories — legends mostly, myths. I've heard it from elders in Bantu villages, traced it to the bush natives of Tanzania."

"But there is such a crown?"

Joyner frowned. "I happen to be one who believes there *was* a Crown of Orpheus. Most of my colleagues disagree. But perhaps I've dug a little deeper into the ancient civilizations of Africa. There is mention of it in early Greek writings.

"It was a Phoenician treasure, highly regarded by those early seafarers — a solid gold crown studded with jewels. But what made it distinctive, I understand, was the finely wrought figure of their sea god, half man, half fish, holding a trident in his hand."

Joyner leaned back, puffed on his pipe. "Probably priceless in today's antiquities market."

Shayne nodded. "Could a man like Gordon Hansen have found it?"

Joyner took the pipe from his mouth, reflected. "Quite possibly. He spent a good deal of his life in East Africa, I understand." He smiled. "The Horn of Africa . . . Arab dhows still wait for the seasonal winds to bring them down from the Red Sea to Mombasa and Dar es Salaam."

"I'm not up on ancient African history." Shayne smiled. "But you think the Phoenicians might have lost or traded the crown —"

"No," Joyner interrupted. "Not according to what I know." He tapped his pipe bowl in his ash-tray. "Have you ever heard of the Garamante civilization, Shayne?"

The big private investigator shook his head.

"A lost African civilization, about the time of the Graeco-Roman period. Not much is known about them. They left behind them no written records. But they were traders from middle Africa. Their ancient caravan routes can still be traced, if one knows where to look. The Romans were especially dependent on them for the wild animals they used in their games. Slaves, too."

"Jewels?"

Joyner nodded. "They traded anything they could get their

hands on. It is my belief they either traded for, or stole, the Phoenician Crown of Orpheus. And then, in turn, it was either lost or stolen from them . . ."

Shayne ran this through his mind for a bit, then: "And you believe this crown exists?"

Joyner shrugged. "As I told you, I'm in the minority." He smiled. "But now you've aroused my curiosity. How did you learn of the Crown of Orpheus?"

"From a client of mine," Shayne replied. He took out the note Milly Hansen had received, handed it across the desk to Professor Joyner.

"The man who wrote this," the redhead added, "took a shot at me last night."

Professor Joyner shook his head in disbelief. "I don't understand it, Shayne. As I've said, only a handful of people — African scholars mainly — know of this. And the majority of them don't even believe it exists."

"This man does," Shayne said grimly, taking the note back from Joyner. "And he's willing to kill for it!"

IV

THE GORDON HANSEN Museum was a converted estate south of Miami and bordering Biscayne Bay. Built by a New York banker before the great stock market crash of 1929, it had remained in isolated splendor on more than

one hundred acres of marshland and cultivated grounds until harder times forced the heirs to sell off most of the land.

Now rows of tract homes on fill land surrounded it, leaving the original home and its fifteen remaining acres sheltered behind a high stone wall.

Gordon Hansen had converted it to a private museum with living quarters on the third floor and spent close to seventy thousand dollars on the tropical grounds surrounding it. He knew he could never approximate the game lands of Central Africa — Miami received too much rain for that — but he did try to provide a small facsimile of a Congo jungle. At one time he had even tried to get licensed for a small private zoo for African fauna.

It was mid-afternoon when Mike Shayne drove through the open iron gates on which was hung a sign which read —

MUSEUM OPEN DAILY

9:00 AM to 4:00 PM

Closed MONDAYS

There were a few cars parked on the small gravel lot adjacent to the entrance. The jungle grounds began immediately beyond, and even in daylight they looked dark, forbidding.

The Museum itself, Shayne saw, was a three-story building, Victorian in architecture, with high-ceilinged, long, narrow win-

dows, solidly built. Vines climbing along iron-framed window balconies, smothering bronze water-spouts decorated with lion heads.

The big redhead parked his Buick in the shade of a towering tree overlooking the parking lot and went inside.

A pretty college girl greeted him from behind a small table in the foyer. The entrance fee was three dollars. Shayne paid it and was given a small booklet explaining the Museum's history and its African artifacts. Tours of the Museum were conducted twice daily, with Miss Millicent Hansen, the founder's daughter, as guide.

Shayne shoved the booklet inside his coat pocket and asked where he could find Miss Hansen.

The girl pointed to a door on the far side of the big entrance hall. "Are you from the bank?" she inquired.

The big redhead shook his head. "Just a personal friend."

"Oh!" The girl's face brightened. "I'm sure she'll be happy to see you."

The large entrance hall just beyond the reception desk was dominated by a life-sized ironwood sculpture of a Masai warrior spearing a lion groveling at his feet. It was an impressive piece of work, carved with utmost fidelity, even to the knotted shoulder and arm muscles of the Masai as he plunged his iron-tipped spear into the big carnivore.

The warrior was tall, lean, and

authentically dressed in red flannel sarong knotted at his left shoulder, a lion headress and holding a bullhide shield.

A rope barrier encircled the sculpture with the polite request PLEASE DO NOT TOUCH hanging from it.

A half dozen people were admiring the piece as the redhead walked by. His casual glance took them in, long years as a trained observer etching them in his mind's eye.

Three were older people, obviously northern tourists, the youngest not less than sixty-five. His glance passed over them, lingered on a tall, angular-bodied woman, perhaps thirty-five but looking older. She was prim-faced, wore black-framed thick-lensed glasses, and her hair, already a pepper-gray, was caught up in an old-fashioned bun on her neck. She looked the stereotype of the schoolteacher of two generations past.

She was holding a ten-year-old boy by the hand, restraining him from ducking under the rope barrier for a more intimate look at the towering Masai warrior.

The man who appeared to be with her was slim, wiry, not more than five feet nine, and could have been anywhere from the late forties to early sixties. Deep lines etched his tanned face. His hair was a silvery white, matching his neatly trimmed goatee. Like the woman, he seemed out of place,

out of time.

He wore a cream-colored Panama hat, a polka-dotted silk scarf around his open-shirted neck and a light-colored Palm Beach linen suit, its jacket already deeply wrinkled in the back. But his eyes, which turned to Shayne as the big redhead walked past, were a startling deep blue, burning with a strange, inner fire.

He turned back to the boy as Shayne's glance swept over him and said something which made the boy grin. The woman, however, seemed uneasy. She pulled the boy away, heading for one of the rooms beyond — and the man, after a moment's hesitation, followed.

Shayne registered this in his head as he knocked on a door marked PRIVATE.

Milly's voice answered with a, "Yes, come in," and the big redhead stepped inside.

The museum office was large, paneled in dark walnut. A large French-type window opened onto a small patio, but honeysuckle, intertwined with bougainvillea, laced the window, making the office, even in daylight, rather gloomy. Evidently the entrance to the patio had not been used in a long time.

A lamp burned on the desk in front of Milly Hansen. She had been going over an inventory list with a tall, bespectacled man, prematurely bald, standing by her.

He turned as Shayne entered

and gave the detective a long cold stare. He didn't like being interrupted, and he showed it.

"Oh — Mr. Shayne," Milly greeted him. "I'm glad you could come." She leaned back and took off her own glasses, pinching the bridge of her nose in a tired gesture.

She turned, looked up at the man beside her. "Horace — this is Michael Shayne, the private investigator I told you about."

To Shayne, "Horace Green-span, my father's secretary. We've been going over the Museum inventory listing."

Horace acknowledged the introduction with little more than a curt nod. "The bank people will be here Thursday," he reminded her. "They'll want to check every item on this inventory."

Milly nodded. "I'm sure they will."

She waited until Horace left, smiled faintly at Shayne. "Don't mind Horace. He's quite upset. He's been with the Museum since my father founded it, and sometimes I think he fancies himself as its curator."

She held up a thick sheaf of fine-lined paper. "I've been going over the original inventory list. There is no mention of a Crown of Orpheus."

Shayne settled his big frame in a leather-bound chair. "You're sure that's the original inventory?"

Milly nodded. "It's in my

father's handwriting and it's been kept in a wall safe upstairs, on the third floor. My father's quarters, until he died."

"Is that where you live?"

"I did — until I began receiving these threats." She glanced toward the window. "We're quite isolated here, and the grounds are, to say the least, quite spooky."

She smiled. "I live in an apartment close to the University now."

Shayne plucked at his left earlobe. "Do you know a Dr. James Joyner?"

"Professor Joyner? Head of African studies at the University?" frowned. "I've heard of him. I've never met him. I believe he criticized Dad's collection in an article when Dad first opened the Museum to the public. I was away at school at the time."

"He believes there was a Crown of Orpheus."

"Then he's the only one," Milly sighed. "Besides, of course, the man who's been threatening me."

Shayne said, "May I have the inventory? I'd like to go over it later, in my office."

Milly looked dubious. "I can let you have a xeroxed copy."

Shayne shook his head. "I need to check the original."

"I'm afraid I can't do that. Horace would have a fit. Besides, the bank people are coming Thursday." She leaned back, closed her eyes for a moment. "I may as well

tell you, Mr. Shayne — the Museum's in receivership. Attendance has fallen off. So have private endowments. I expect the bank will hold a private auction before the end of the year."

"I'm sorry to hear that," Shayne replied. "I promise to have the inventory back here before Thursday."

Milly hesitated. "I don't know what good it will do —"

"Maybe none," the redhead told her. "But there's always the possibility someone deleted the Crown of Orpheus from the list."

Milly stared at him. "You believe there is such an antiquity?"

"Let's check it out," Shayne said.

Milly handed the papers over to Shayne. "Horace will be furious when I tell him."

Shayne slipped the thick sheaf of papers inside his coat pocket.

"Have you received any new threats?"

"No," Milly answered. "Not since the note I showed you this morning."

"If you receive another note, or phone call," Shayne instructed her, "call my office immediately. My secretary will get in touch with me."

"Do you think it's the work of some crank?" Milly asked.

"No." Shayne's tone was hard. "A madman, perhaps. Smart, cunning — and deadly. My advice to you is to go straight home from here, lock yourself in your apart-

ment. Or stay with friends . . . until this man is caught."

"I'm working late tonight," Milly said. "But my fiancé will be picking me up around seven . . ."

"Have you told him about these threats?"

"No. I didn't want to alarm him."

"Tell him," Shayne said.

The redhead started to leave, paused to admire a large oil painting on the wall by the door. It was an African hunting scene — a white hunter standing his ground in front of a charging Cape buffalo. A younger man, seen only in profile, stood as back-up rifleman behind him. Flanking him was a tall, muscular native dressed in a loin cloth.

Milly said: "That's my father — the one shooting the buffalo. It was painted by the renowned South African painter, De Voorhus."

Something was nagging in back of Shayne's mind. "Who's the young man with him?"

"Johnny Targa. He was a protégé of my father. That was his first safari, I believe." She came to stand beside Shayne. "I understand he was killed shortly after that picture was painted."

Shayne walked closer to the painting, then realized details were seen more clearly from a distance. He stepped back, studied the painting. There was something vaguely familiar about Johnny Targa.

"How long ago was that painted?"

"Twenty-five years ago," Milly replied. "Before I was born." She looked at the big redhead. "My father rather liked it. It was the only picture he had of young Johnny — and his old native gun bearer, Sakaria."

Shayne frowned. "You're sure he's dead?"

"That's what my father told me," Milly replied. "Died a year later, on safari. He even wrote about it, in his book." She looked startled. "Why?"

The private investigator shrugged. "Just a thought." He opened the door, looked back. "Remember, if you receive another threat, let me know."

He closed the door, looked around. There was no one in the big entrance hall. The college girl was reading a paperback book.

Shayne checked the smaller rooms. A few people were puzzling over glass-enclosed artifacts, neatly itemized on three-by-five cards.

He found the prim-faced woman with the schoolteacher look and her ten-year-old boy in the Sudanese Room. She looked startled when Shayne approached her.

"The man who was with you," Shayne began. "The one in the Palm Beach suit. Is he your husband?"

The prim-faced woman's mouth pinched in shocked distaste. "Mr. —"

"Shayne," Mike said. "I'm an investigator for the Museum."

"Gee, Auntie," the boy piped up. "Tell him." As the woman just stared. "He was a real weirdo, Mister Shayne. Kept talking about Africa."

"I never saw him before today," the woman said sharply now. "I'm a single lady. This is my nephew, Jonathan. I've been trying to give him cultural advantages his mother —"

"Do you know where he went?" Shayne cut in.

"The weirdo?" the boy answered. "He left right after you came by."

"Mr. Shayne," the woman said stiffly, "I hope you don't think I —"

"Not at all," the detective said, smiling. "He just resembled someone I thought I knew."

The big redhead turned away. The man had some resemblance to the Johnny Targa in the painting. But he could have been mistaken. Johnny Targa was dead . . .

V

SHAYNE CHEWED THOUGHTFULLY on a stick of gum as he drove back to the city. He did not view the threats to Milly, or himself as the work of a crank . . . not after last night. A little further checking was in order.

Commuter traffic was beginning to build up as he swung onto Miami Boulevard and a few

minutes later pulled up in front of the building from which Shayne figured the hoarse-voiced rifleman had fired at him.

It was a new building with a misshapen wrought iron sculpture on the front lawn symbolizing God knew what. Security National. Offices For Lease.

Shayne went inside, sought out the manager.

"Yes," the manager replied to the redhead's question. "Several new tenants have moved in recently. Within the month." He was pleasant, but cautious. "Are you interested in office space, Mr. —"

"Shayne." The redhead showed the manager his credentials. "I'm making an investigation," he added. "Insurance fraud."

The manager looked alarmed.

"Discreetly, of course," Shayne said. "But I would appreciate your cooperation."

The manager hesitated. "We have a clause in our lease agreements concerning privacy of our tenants."

"I did say discreetly," Shayne cut in. "However, if you prefer I call Police Chief Gentry and have him send an officer with a warrant —?"

"No need for that," the manager said hastily. He checked a listing. "Just within the month?" Shayne nodded. "Well, H.L. Forsyth, Marine Insurance, moved into Suite 1408, Johnson and Lamont, Notions Wholesalers in

1531 and a Mark Redford, Imports and Exports in 1423."

Shayne said: "I'll check them out."

The manager looked nervous. "If you don't mind, you won't mention I —"

"I haven't seen you," Shayne said.

He headed for the elevators, got off on the fourteenth floor. There was a pretty girl behind a desk in 1408, Marine Insurance. She told Shayne that H.L. Forsyth was out. Could she take a message?

Shayne said he was an old friend, that he'd be back later.

Mark Redford's door was locked. A four-by-five card wedged into the frosted glass framing said he'd be back next Thursday.

Only Lamont and Johnson were in, and neither man was under sixty. Nor did they look like men who knew how to handle a high-powered rifle.

Lamont, a thin, dyspeptic-looking man whose Middle-European accent belied his Anglicized name said: "Yes, we sometimes work nights. Are you interested in buttons, zippers, lace?"

Shayne grinned. "I'm a private investigator. I'm checking out a client."

Lamont scowled. "Private investigator. Like those fellows on TV . . . Kosak, Bimby Jones, Rocky Files . . .?"

"Kojak," Shayne smiled. "He's

a New York cop. And I think you mean Barnaby Jones."

Lamont made an offhand gesture. "Kosak . . . Kojak . . . always sucking lollipops yet." He shook his head. "A fine example for young people, Mr. —"

"Shayne — Mike Shayne."

"Police protection we pay for," Lamont went on. Evidently it was a sore subject with him. "Police protection we don't get. Like last night." Lamont rubbed his chin nervously. "There was a prowler in the building. On the roof. I heard a shot."

He glanced at the white-haired man in back of the office, talking on the telephone.

"I was alone here. We don't keep money in the office, but these days you never know. So I called the police. You know what they told me?" Lamont's voice rose indignantly. "'Old man,' they said, 'are you sure you heard a shot? You see the prowler?'"

Shayne was interested. "Did you?"

"Are you crazy, mister? I pay taxes for the police to look for prowlers."

The man in the office behind him, Lamont's partner, put down the receiver and called to him.

Lamont said, "You come back another time, eh, Kosak? I am busy now."

Shayne nodded, waved to Lamont's partner and walked out. Lamont had confirmed his suspicion that someone had fired at him

from the roof of this building. But after talking with Lamont, the redhead understood why the police had been skeptical.

Mike Shayne doubted the rifleman would make another try. Especially with the detective alerted and making sure he no longer presented a tempting target.

Still, it had to be someone with office space here. The building was locked after six, and the building security guard checked people in after hours.

The manager told Shayne the night guard had reported nothing unusual. Yes, some of the tenants worked late hours.

Shayne thanked him for the information and went outside, crossing to his street-parked car just in time to avoid a parking ticket. The red flag was up and the meter maid was writing out a ticket for the car behind him.

Shayne waved to her as he drove off.

The big redhead hadn't eaten since breakfast. He pulled into a coffee shop, ordered a sandwich and coffee and took time to make a phone call while the order was being filled. The phones were in the hallway to the rest rooms, and men and women jostled him as he all but stuck his head between the plastic side shields to talk.

His first call was to the Miami *Daily News*.

He heard his message relayed

across the copy room, then Tim Rourke, the paper's ace reporter, came on the line.

"Yeah, Mike. What's cooking?"

"My goose, maybe," Mike growled. "I need some information." He told Rourke what had happened.

Tim's low whistle came over the wire. "You sound worried."

"You're damned right I'm worried," Shayne snapped. "I don't like getting shot at."

"Sounds to me like a page one story," Tim said. "Mike Shayne, Miami's ace private investigator, target of unknown killer —"

"Can't think of anything except your front page?" Mike told him. "I want you to dig into your files on Gordon Hansen. I remember the *Daily News* carrying a story on him some years ago."

"Great feature," Rourke shot back. "Real human interest stuff. With sidelights. Hansen was picketed by the pacifists, the environmentalists, Women's Lib and, if I recall, the anti-gun groups."

"Forget that angle," Shayne said. "I want info on a young protege of Gordon's — a man named Johnny Targa."

"Can do," the ace reporter replied. "When do you want it?"

"As soon as possible," Shayne replied.

Tim was warming up to his feature idea. "I can see a ten-part on-going series, Mike. Vanishing

Africa. The last of the old white hunters —"

The redhead hung up on Rourke and called his office. Lucy sounded worried. No, no important calls. Except from Will Gentry. What has Michael Shayne been up to?

Shayne said he'd call the police chief later and fill Lucy in when he stopped by the office.

He walked back to his stool to find his coffee and sandwich waiting for him. He took out the inventory Milly had given him, studied it as he munched on his roast beef sandwich. It looked clean. Still . . .

He paid his check, went back to the phone, checked a number he had not had occasion to call in a long time.

A man answered. "Shayne? Yeah, I'll be in." The man chuckled pleasantly. "Bring a bottle."

VI

THE NAMEPLATE on the shabby office door read: H.L. OSTRIC, TOYS 'N' THINGS. It was on the third floor of a rundown downtown office building overlooking a narrow, congested street. When the wind was right, the smell off Biscayne Bay's tidal flats was overpowering.

Shayne tried the door, found it open, walked in. There was a small anteroom about the size of a closet and a slightly larger room with a window just beyond. An old window air-conditioner rattled

and wheezed, sending a flow of cool air over a man behind a desk.

This man was short, round-faced, brown wavy hair. Shayne knew the wavy hair was straight out of a shop specializing in men's hairpieces.

He was reading a Travis McGee mystery when Shayne approached. He looked the picture of weary innocence — the common man beset by life's insoluble problems, finding escape in a paperback book.

Shayne shoved his feet off the worn desk and Ostric looked up, as though surprised. "Oh — hi, Mike."

"Cool the act," Shayne suggested.

Ostric sighed. "Habits are hard to break," he apologized.

He watched the big redhead take a bottle of brandy out of a brown paper bag, place it on the desk. "Martell," Ostric said. "My favorite brand."

"Everything's your favorite brand." Shayne sighed. He waited until Ostric took two glasses from a bottom drawer, placed them on a paper towel on his desk.

Ostric was forty-one, and twenty-five of those years had been spent in and out of jail. He looked small, frail . . . but Shayne knew better. Ostric could shinny up a waterspout five stories to a roof without breathing hard. He had been a cat burglar before turning specialist and forger . . . he had never carried or used a

gun, which had mitigated his sentences and probably been his salvation.

The redhead had helped put him behind bars several times, had kept him out of jail a couple more. He had helped Ostric go straight. The sign on Ostric's door was not a phony. He did oversee a group of delinquent juveniles on probation who made toys for ghetto children. Ostric was funded by a State program, and the juveniles were given a chance to earn money in a good cause, instead of ripping off old ladies for it.

Mike opened the bottle, poured. Ostric raised his glass. "Cheers, Mike."

The formalities over with, Ostric leaned back, said: "What can I do you in for?"

It was an old joke, and Mike ignored it. He took out the Museum inventory, handed it across the desk. "I want you to take a good look at this."

Ostric took the inventory. For just a moment he looked puzzled. Then he glanced up at Shayne. "Good paper. Forgery?"

Shayne nodded.

"Nice penmanship," Ostric observed. "Old Palmer style. Notice how the O's are rounded off."

"I see it."

"What are we looking for?"

"A missing item," the big redhead said. "Replaced by something else."

Ostric studied the inventory.

"Good quality paper, sort of like parchment. Don't see it around any more. Writing done with old-fashioned pen, not ball point. Hmmm . . ." He looked up at Shayne again. "What's missing?"

"An item. The Crown of Orpheus."

Something flickered briefly in Ostric's gaze before he lowered his head. "Why . . . was it worth anything?"

"Maybe a million dollars," Shayne answered. He finished his brandy. "What do you think?"

Ostric rubbed the side of his nose. "First look doesn't tell me anything. Must have been an expert on inks to be able to erase and replace the item without showing. And, a damn good forgery, too." He leaned back. "When do you want it?"

"By this time tomorrow," Shayne said. "I have to return that inventory Thursday."

Ostric nodded. "I'll have to make a few expensive calls —"

Shayne laid out two twenties and a ten. "That cover it?"

Ostric nodded. "Leave the bottle, Mike. I'll try to have an answer by noon tomorrow . . ."

Mike Shayne drove back to his hotel, took the elevator to his suite. He wanted time to relax, think things over before he went out to meet Rourke.

He changed his shirt, took a glass of brandy with him into the living room, called Lucy at the office.

Lucy sounded frantic, upset. "Michael — where have you been?"

"Around town," Mike said. "Why — what's happened?"

"Someone called a few minutes ago. He didn't leave his name. He said to give you this message." There was a short wait while Lucy found her notebook. "Tell Shayne I'm sorry he didn't take my advice. The death tonight will be on his head."

Shayne frowned. "The man who called — did he sound hoarse?"

"Yes. And he had a strange laugh." Lucy was obviously worried. "Who is he, Michael? What did he mean?"

Mike didn't want to worry Lucy unduly. "Probably just some practical joker," he told her. He glanced at his watch. "It's late. Lock up and go home."

"I expected you back in the office," Lucy said. "Some women called . . . a Gertrude Moriarty from Miami Beach. She lost her prize poodle, Wimpy. She thinks someone stole him and she wants to engage you."

"Tell her to contact the dog-catcher," Shayne growled.

"What about that women's dinner speaking engagement?"

"Saturday . . . at the old Fontainebleau? Yeah — tell them I'll be there — for my usual fee."

Shayne hung up, settled back with his brandy. It was beginning to get dark outside. He ran his knuckles speculatively across the

red stubble showing on his chin. He had tried not to worry Lucy, but the call she had received bothered the redhead. Whose death?

He put out the lights, walked to the window . . . he stood there in the dark, looking out across the distance to the Security National building. A few lights showed, scattered across the face of the building.

The city below looked peaceful enough. The usual jam of traffic in the streets . . . people going home . . . or going out. But somewhere out there a deranged man with a rifle prowled, and perhaps even he didn't know who his next victim would be.

Shayne drew the curtains across the window, snapped on the lights, and was about to dial Tim when the phone rang. It was Milly Hansen, and she was hysterical.

"Mike . . . oh, my god . . . my fiancée . . . he's been shot . . ."

Shayne stiffened. "Where?"

"Here — at the Museum. He . . . he's lying out there, under the portico."

"Where are you?"

"In my office. I've locked all doors . . ." Her voice became incoherent. Out of it Mike got "Oh God! I'm afraid . . ."

Shayne broke in. "Call the police! I'll be there in thirty minutes!"

VII

THE POLICE WERE already there

when Mike Shayne pulled into the Museum parking lot. Men were combing the grounds, looking for footprints, anything they could find. A police photographer was taking shots of something under the Museum portico.

A police ambulance had taken Milly's fiancée to the City Hospital.

Al Rolfe of Homicide was in charge. He and Shayne knew each other. They weren't exactly friends, but there was respect between them.

The lieutenant met Shayne as the redhead stepped out of his car. Rolfe was a big rumpled man with the look of a friendly bear.

"Hi, Shayne. Been expecting you."

Shayne looked toward the house. "How is she?"

"Miss Hansen? She'll be all right. But she's in shock. Doctor's with her now."

"What happened?"

Rolfe shrugged. "Her fiancée was shot when he stepped under the portico light to ring the night bell. Miss Hansen was expecting him. She heard the shot, ran out. There was another shot, missed her by a foot. She ran back to her office, locked herself in."

Shayne nodded, turned his attention to the far end of the parking lot, where men with flashlights were searching the grounds.

"The killer was waiting out there, under those trees," Rolfe said. "He shot Mr. Hempstead with a high-powered rifle."

"Mr. Hempstead?"

"Kenneth Hempstead — of the Bal Harbour Hempsteads." The lieutenant's lips tightened. "You know what that means, Shayne."

"Yeah," Shayne said tightly. It meant a lot of pressure on the Miami Police Department.

"Know who'd want to kill him?" Rolfe asked.

The redhead shook his head. "What did Miss Hansen tell you?"

"Not much. Something about receiving threatening notes from someone she doesn't know. Some crank, she thought — until this happened."

"That's why she hired me," Shayne said. "But at the moment, Lieutenant, I don't know any more than she does." He glanced toward the house. "Mind if I talk to her?"

The homicide man shrugged. "I have her statement. And we're about through here."

Shayne started to move away, looked back. "Was he killed?"

Rolfe shook his head. "Hempstead was still alive when he left here. Just barely."

He walked with Shayne toward the Museum. "You have no idea who's been threatening her — or why?"

Shayne hesitated. No use giving Lieutenant Rolfe information he wasn't sure of.

"Nothing solid, Lieutenant. When I do, I'll call you."

Rolfe's brown eyes searched the

big redhead's face. He knew Shayne well enough not to press.

"Yeah . . . do that."

He turned away to join the police photographer as Shayne went inside.

Doctor Medwick met Shayne at the office door. "I've given her a sedative," he said, glancing back at Milly Hansen on the office couch. "It's been a shock for her. But she should be fine in the morning."

Milly sat up as Shayne approached. Tears stained her face.

"Mike . . . oh, Mike!"

"Come on." Shayne spoke gently. "I'll take you home."

Milly shuddered. "I'm afraid. He's out there somewhere — a crazy man . . ."

Shayne sat down beside her, took her trembling hand in his. "You can't stay here."

"Here?" Milly looked around the room. "I *hate* this place now! I'm *glad* the bank is taking it over . . ." She turned back to the redhead. "Why Ken, Mike? Why not me?"

"Because he needs you alive," Shayne answered. "He thinks you have the Crown of Orpheus!"

"He's *crazy*! There *is* no such crown — there never *was*!"

"*He* thinks there is," Shayne said.

Milly's lips trembled. "Do you?"

"I don't know," Shayne replied. He stood up, turned to the painting on the wall. *Johnny Targa*?

It *had* to be!

Shayne walked back to the desk, picked up the phone. Lucy answered his call, he told her what had happened.

Lucy was agreeable, as always. "The poor thing," she murmured. "Of *course* she can stay with me. I'll straighten out the guest room."

Tim Rourke was waiting for Shayne at the Scotch & Sirloin, a newly opened bistro not too far from the *Daily News*. The night editor had relayed the information when Shayne called from Lucy's apartment.

It was nine o'clock when the detective parked his car and went in. Tim was at the bar, his hat cocked back on his head. He was talking to someone on the phone when Shayne tapped him on the shoulder.

Tim turned, said, "About time, Mike." He swung back to the phone, said: "He just walked in. I'll have a story on it for the morning edition..."

He hung up, motioned to a booth in the far corner. As they walked to it, Tim said, "There was a shooting at the Hansen Museum. Know anything about it, Mike?"

Shayne nodded. The bar was dimly lighted. So was the dining room beyond. Waitresses in skimpy costumes, picked for bra size, moved among the tables. Not a good sign, Shayne thought sourly. Good food didn't need girly

advertisement.

A pert brunette took their orders. As she moved away, Shayne filled Tim in on what had occurred at the Museum.

Tim whistled softly. "Kenneth Hempstead. 'Yale Law, Hempstead money.'" He shook a cigaret out of a crumpled pack, stuck it between his lips, lighted up.

"How is he?"

"In intensive care at City Hospital. Hanging on."

"Anything else you care to tell me, Mike. For publication?"

Shayne shook his head.

Tim stood up. I'll phone the story in for the early edition. I'll do a follow-up in the morning."

The waitress brought their drinks while Tim was phoning the night city editor. She leaned way over to set the drinks down and Mike couldn't miss what she was displaying.

"Your steaks will be ready in a few minutes," she said.

Shayne watched her leave. A divorcee, probably, with a kid to support. Or maybe just a working wife. Working for minimum wage, hoping her outfit would make up for it in tips.

Tim came back, slipped into the booth.

Shayne said, "What did you find on Hansen?"

Rourke reached inside his pocket, tossed a batch of clippings on the table.

"Hell," Shayne growled, "I'm

too tired to read them. Tell me about it."

Tim shrugged. "Interviews, mostly. You know the sort of thing — famous white hunter retires, settles in Miami. Good copy."

"What about the Museum?"

"Opened in seventy-two. Several feature articles, some publicity and fanfare. Interviews with several leading African scholars. One of them was a local, Dr. James Joyner."

Shayne was interested. "He was there?"

"At the opening? Yeah." Tim smiled. "Didn't have anything good to say about Gordon's collection, although he was kind about it."

"Was there mention of a lost antiquity, the Crown of Orpheus?"

"The what?"

The redhead finished his drink. "An African treasure, worth maybe a million dollars. Gordon was supposed to have found it on one of his treks through Africa."

Tim scratched the tip of his nose. "Yeah, come to think of it. Gordon mentions it in his book."

"Africa Behind The Sights Of A .457?"

Tim nodded.

"You have a copy?"

"No. I *did* have. Loaned it to somebody. Damned if I can remember who."

Shayne frowned. "What did he say about it?"

"Only that he ran across rumors

of a lost civilization."

"The Garamante?"

"Yeah — that's the name."

Tim looked surprised. "He and Johnny Targa went up into Ethiopia to look for it."

"Did he find it?"

"Gordon doesn't say — not in the book, anyway." Tim fumbled through the clippings. "I guess Gordon mentioned it when he opened the Museum, because none of the African scholars believed him. Said there was no such antiquity."

"What did Dr. Joyner say?"

"Same thing. Even hinted Gordon might be trying to hoax the academic world to spark interest in his museum."

Shayne settled back. "I remember it didn't go over too well."

"I think his book started it. College kids began picketing the museum right after it came out. Gordon's accounts of hunting big game in Africa didn't sit well with the college activists, animal lovers, gun-haters. The book ran through one printing, as I remember, then died."

"What about Johnny Targa?"

"Like I said; Mike, he's mentioned in the book," Tim said. "He and Gordon were on a trek into Ethiopian bush country when Johnny was killed. Gordon escaped."

The girl brought their dinners. As Shayne had feared, the steaks were tenderized. But the redhead was too preoccupied to care.

VIII

MIKE SHAYNE WAS having a bad dream when the call awakened him. It was after midnight, and he had just fallen asleep. He was being chased down a long dark corridor that never ended by something he couldn't see.

He awakened with heartburn, a condition the redhead seldom encountered, and groped for the phone on his bedside table.

"Yeah," he muttered. "Shayne . . ."

The caller's voice was familiar. "Did I awaken you, Shayne?" The man chuckled hoarsely. "Someone was killed because you refused to heed my warning. I told you not to take on Miss Hansen as a client."

The detective snapped awake. He swung his legs over the side of the bed, sat up.

"Damn you, Johnny Targa!" he grated. "You're crazy! Shooting an innocent man."

"The Crown of Orpheus, handed over to me by noon tomorrow," the voice interrupted. "Or, you're next, Shayne!"

The man hung up before Shayne could answer.

The redhead reached for his pack of cigarets on his bedside table, lighted up. Sleep, for the moment, was out of the question. He puffed slowly, thinking things over.

A breeze wafted in through his open window. Shayne butted out

his cigaret, walked to the window, eased the curtain aside. The windows of the distant office building shone in the light of a high-riding gibbous moon. But the offices behind them were dark. If someone had called Shayne from there, he had put on no lights.

Shayne walked to his kitchen, poured himself a stiff shot of brandy.

Had there ever been a Crown of Orpheus? Had Gordon Hansen kept it a secret? If so, why? He had written about it in his book, according to Tim Rourke — a lost treasure he and Johnny Targa had set out to track down. Had Gordon found it?

Why had Dr. James Joyner, in an earlier interview, been quoted as saying there was no such antiquity? Had Joyner been misquoted?

The key was Johnny Targa.

Gordon had thought Johnny dead. And for almost twenty-five years he had not been heard from. His obituary had appeared in a Nairobi newspaper . . . he had been toasted in silent tribute by the white hunters gathered in the trophy room of the "Tiltin'" Hilton.

Johnny Targa was dead! Or was he?

There was a way to find out. In the morning.

Shayne went back to bed.

Mike Shayne awakened at seven, refreshed, without heartburn. He showered, shaved, put

off breakfast until he could get to his favorite coffee shop. But he didn't put off his favorite morning pick-me-up . . . black coffee with a generous shot of Martell.

Then he put in a call to Ostric.

There was no answer. Mike glanced at his watch. It was now eight-ten. Ostric probably was having breakfast.

Shayne was on his way out when the phone rang. It was Will Gentry. The Police Chief was friendly, but firm. He wanted to see Mike. Down at the precinct. Yeah, sure . . . after Shayne had his breakfast would be soon enough.

Shayne knew what Gentry wanted. The pressure was already on. And he wanted a full explanation of Shayne's role in the Milly Hansen affair.

Shayne had ham and eggs, two cups of coffee, and the morning paper at the counter of the Tami-ami Coffee Shop. The morning account of the shooting of Kenneth Hempstead at the Gordon Hansen Museum was sketchy. Police were puzzled. Robbery had not been the motive. The story tailed off with background information on the Hempstead family.

It was now nine-thirty. Shayne paid his check, left the paper on the counter for someone else to read, and went into the phone booth. There was no listing for Mark Redford, Imports and Exports. Mike dialed information and asked for the number.

The woman operator hesitated. "This is an unlisted —"

"This is a police matter," Shayne cut in. "And urgent."

The girl on the other end of the line was young, impressionable.

"Yes, sir!" she replied. She gave Shayne Redford's phone number.

The big redhead dialed it. He didn't expect to find Redford in, and he wasn't disappointed. After three rings a woman's voice answered. "This is Mr. Redford's answering service. May I help you?"

"Oh, Mark must still be at home," Shayne said. "I knew he had a cold. Is he still in bed?"

"I wouldn't know," the answering service told him.

"Does he call in for messages?"

"Every day," Shayne was assured.

"You don't know when he'll be in his office?"

"No. He does have a bad cold," the woman said. "Sounds very hoarse. Bad case of laryngitis, I'd say." The woman's voice became professional. "Do you wish to leave a message?"

"Yes," Shayne said. "Tell him a friend called — Mike Shayne. I cannot have what he wanted for him at noon today. But if he'll meet me at the Gordon Hansen Museum tonight I'll have it for him."

There was a long moment while the answering service jotted Shayne's message down.

"Tonight," the woman said. "What time?"

"Around nine," Shayne answered. "You *will* see that Mark gets my message, won't you?"

"Of course," the woman replied coldly. "Is there anything else?"

"No. Just tell Mark it's urgent."

Shayne hung up, plucked thoughtfully at his left earlobe. Mark Redford, Imports and Exports. A man with a hoarse voice, recently moved into an office close to the top floor of the building from which Shayne had been fired upon. It added up to Johnny Targa — a man returned from the dead!

"A *white hunter*!" Gentry exploded. "Mike, you telling me some crazy big game hunter from Africa is in Miami, taking pot shots at people?"

"That's exactly what I'm telling you," Shayne said. He was facing Gentry, who was behind his desk, chewing on a stub of cigar. "Name's Johnny Targa. Rented office space in that new Security National office building down on Miami Boulevard, under the name of Mark Redford."

Gentry heaved to his feet. "You just said Johnny Targa was dead?"

"That's what Miss Hansen told me," Shayne answered patiently. "What her father believed."

"But you don't?"

Shayne shook his head. "I saw him in the Museum yesterday. I

didn't know who he was then. But after I saw the painting in the Museum office I know he was the man. Twenty-five years older, but he was Johnny Targa."

"I'll put out an APB on him, have him picked up," Gentry growled.

Shayne stopped him. "On what charge, Will? My sayso?" The redhead shook his head. "We can't even prove he is Johnny Targa — not at this point."

Gentry scowled. "You know the kind of pressure I'm getting . . .?"

"Not enough to start pulling in innocent people for police questioning," Shayne pointed out. "He may be crazy . . . but he's smart. The minute he calls his answering service and gets my message he'll know his Mark Redford cover is blown. You could stake out that office building for a year and never see him."

Gentry settled back behind his desk. "In the meantime we sit back, wait for his next victim —"

"Which happens to be me," Shayne replied.

Gentry threw his cigar stub into his wastebasket, spat out bits of tobacco. "He's threatened to kill you?"

"Flat out," the redhead said quietly. "Last night." He dug out a cigaret, lighted up.

Gentry walked to his door, opened it, called to someone in the outer office. A moment later a police officer stuck his head inside. "Lieutenant Rolfe is out,

he informed them."

"Tell him I want to see him as soon as he gets in," Gentry barked. He turned back to Shayne. "I want Rolfe in on this," he told the big redhead.

Shayne nodded. "A good man. But I'm not waiting for Johnny to take another shot at me. And I'm not taking myself off this case."

"Be a lot wiser if you did," Gentry scowled. "But I know you too well, Mike. What do you intend to do?"

"I put out bait," Shayne said. "He's a hunter, Will — let's see if he'll bite."

He retold the Police Chief about the message he had left for Mark Redford.

Gentry scowled. "Worth a try," he admitted. "I'll have a police stakeout —"

"Hold it, Will," Shayne interrupted. "No cops. If he is Johnny Targa — and I believe he is — he'll smell a stakeout a mile off."

"Plain clothes, no squad cars," Gentry said.

"The Museum closes at four," Shayne pointed out. "Visitors after that hour will stand out like sore thumbs."

"I can't allow it," Gentry said firmly. "I've already had one man shot."

"He won't shoot me," Shayne said. "Not right away. He wants the Crown of Orpheus. He'll have to check me out first." The big redhead grinned wryly. "I've

never been to Africa on safari. But I saw an old Stewart Granger movie once."

Gentry snorted.

"I'll need your cooperation," Shayne went on. "A request from you to the head of that big Bal Harbour department store your wife shops in. And the loan of your police artist for a couple of hours."

"I know the signs," Will Gentry sighed. "You've got something up your sleeve."

"A hope and a prayer," Shayne admitted. "Will you do it?"

"What is it?"

Shayne told him what he wanted done.

Gentry stared. "You're crazier than he is," he growled. He leaned back in his chair, searched for a cigar in a drawer. "The Crown of Orpheus, you say? Is there such a thing?"

"I think there is," Shayne replied. "Worth a fortune. Johnny Targa wouldn't be in Miami if there wasn't."

"Who has it then?"

"Not the Hansen Museum," Shayne replied. "Not Milly Hansen, anyway." He plucked a cigar from his coat pocket, handed it to Gentry. "Meant to give you this last week. Friend of mine's wife had a baby."

Gentry eyed the cigar after Shayne left. The cellophane wrapper's label read: It's a Boy. It was a cheap cigar and, after a week in Shayne's pocket, stale.

The Police Chief tossed it into his wastebasket.

IX

OSTRIC WAS STILL out when Shayne called. It was now after one in the afternoon. This bothered the big redhead. Ostric *had* assured him he'd have his report by noon.

Shayne drove his Buick to a side street close to Ostric's office, found a cramped parking space close to an open area where school kids were playing street hockey with a tin can. The boys watched him lock the car. Shayne called the biggest of them over, handed him a dollar, told him to watch his car.

Ostric's office was in an old brick building. Shayne climbed the three flights of stairs, turned left along a shabby hallway.

It was quiet on this floor. The other offices were either empty, or not being used. A door marked MEN stood open with a naked light bulb shining inside. The stench from within was overpowering.

Shayne walked to Ostric's office, knocked. It was quiet inside. Looked as if Ostric wasn't in. But maybe he had left Shayne a message.

The big redhead put his hand on the knob. Ostric never locked his door. He had nothing anyone would want to steal he once had told Mike.

Something warned him! A faint stir from within — a gurgling sound, a scuffling . . .

Shayne tensed. "*Ostric?*"

Someone answered with a choking, gagging sound. Shayne started to open the door, felt a slight resistance and acted instinctively. He twisted back and away, pressing against the hallway wall just as the shotgun blasted from inside the office.

Shayne felt a burning at his shoulder as he fell back. Buckshot splintered the edge of Ostric's office door, made a deadly pattern in the wall across the hall!

Shayne felt of his shoulder, found a tear, felt the sticky touch of blood. Not bad, but the buckshot tears burned. He slipped his gun into his hand, shoved the door wide open and glanced inside the room, ready to fire if necessary. He saw Ostric lying on the floor of the inner office. Ostric was trying to crawl toward him.

Shayne ducked inside, gun ready.

There was no sound, only Ostric's ragged breathing. Someone had disconnected the rattly air-conditioner.

Ostric's glazed eyes tried to focus. "Mike . . . ?"

The name was barely audible.

Shayne twisted around the inner door jamb, gun ready. There was no one else in Ostric's small office. A .16 gauge shotgun was levelled across Ostric's scarred desk, butt wired to the chair,

muzzle targeting the door. A cord ran from the trigger to the outer doorknob. It was a crude but deadly trap, and if the redhead's instincts hadn't warned him, it might have worked.

The lone window was open. The air-conditioner had been taken out and lay on the floor, providing quick exit to the fire escape outside.

Shayne crossed quickly to the window, looked out. Below was a littered alley. A mongrel dog was scrounging around inside a garbage can. He saw no one else.

Shayne went back to Ostric. The small man had been shot twice in the chest. He should be dead. Whoever had shot him must have thought so.

Shayne knelt beside the dying man. "Ostric," he said gently. "Who . . . ?"

Ostric's eyes bulged as he tried to talk. "Mike . . . double-crossed . . ." Then blood choked him. His head drooped. He was dead.

Shayne stood by the body for a moment. Johnny Targa? Could be. But why kill Ostric? Set a gun trap for him? Ostric didn't have what Johnny wanted. He hadn't even known about the Crown of Orpheus until Mike had told him.

Shayne made a quick search of Ostric's pockets. Nothing to give him a clue. He searched the office for the inventory he had given Ostric. It didn't take long. There

was a small, three-drawer file cabinet beside Ostric's desk. Nothing there.

Shayne plucked at his left earlobe. Ostric had taken it somewhere. Where?

Shayne spun around as he heard voices coming up the stairs. The voices were excited, and in Spanish. Shayne ducked out of the office, slipped into the men's room. He waited there until a small group of Cuban-Americans had gone into Ostric's office. Then he slipped out and down the stairs without being seen.

The boy was cleaning his windshield when Shayne came up. The Buick appeared to be in one piece. Shayne gave him another dollar and drove off.

The redhead drove back to his hotel, left the car in the underground garage and took the elevator up to his room. He peeled off his coat and shirt and examined the buckshot wounds in his right shoulder. Small flesh cuts, three of them. He doctored them with tincture of iodine, covered them with several bandaids, put on a fresh shirt and coat.

He had been lucky.

He put in a call to his office. Lucy answered, obviously relieved to hear his voice.

Shayne kept his tone casual. Just checking in, he told her. Yes, Angel . . . he had gotten in touch with Chief Gentry. Nothing to worry about. Was Milly Hansen still at Lucy's apartment? He

wanted to talk to her.

Lucy told him Milly had gone to the hospital.

Shayne hung up, thought for a moment, then dialed the police precinct. He got Gentry on the line,

"It's me — Shayne," Mike said. "I thought I'd better call you, before your fingerprint experts inform you I was in Ostric's office today. Yeah, I know he was killed. I was there when he died. Someone shot him, set a shotgun trap for me . . ."

"What were you doing there?" Gentry barked. "Dammit, Mike! If you're holding out on me . . ."

"I'll explain later," Shayne said. "Now about those items I requested?"

There was a long pause on the other end of the line and Shayne guessed the Chief was fuming.

"I'm not holding out on you," the big redhead repeated. "I went to see Ostric to check on an inventory listing I had given him. He promised to get it back to me today. Look, Will," Shayne added impatiently, "I said I'd tell you all about it later."

Gentry's tone was more controlled when he answered. "Yeah, they're ready, Mike. But I still don't like it."

"It's my neck," Shayne said.

"And my head," Gentry snarled, "if something happens to you tonight!"

Milly Hansen was sitting in the waiting room when Shayne walked

in. A police guard was at the door, another on the floor above, where Kenneth Hempstead lay in intensive care.

Milly turned her face to him as Shayne sat down beside her.

"How is he?" Mike asked.

"Better," Milly replied. Her face and voice showed strain. "Ken's father and mother are with him. They've brought in specialists." Her fingers played nervously with her handbag. "I don't understand," she began. "I don't know who would want to hurt Ken."

"Johnny Targa," Shayne answered.

Disbelief crept into Milly's face. "No! Johnny's dead. My father —"

"— thought he was," Shayne put in. "But Johnny's here, in Miami. And . . . there is a Crown of Orpheus."

Milly stared at him. "There can't be. I've been with the Museum since my father died. I never saw anything like it. Nor was it in my father's original inventory."

"It was," the big redhead said. "Someone changed it."

"I don't understand," Milly said. "Why would anyone —?"

"I don't know who changed the listing," Shayne cut in. "It could have been your father, for reasons of his own." Shayne plucked a cigaret from his pack, lighted up. A woman nearby frowned at him and pointed to a NO SMOKING

sign on the wall. Shayne butted it out.

"Did your father ever talk to you about the trek he and Johnny took into the bush country?"

Milly shook her head. "But he did mention it in his book."

"Have you read it?"

Milly lowered her gaze. "No. But I have a copy of it at home." She hesitated, then raised her gaze to look Shayne squarely in the eye. "You may as well know. He was my father, but — well, there was a wall between us. Mainly of my own making. That's why I stayed away in school. He deserted my mother, you know — left her back in Mombasa. I always thought he was ashamed of her." She sighed. "My mother's dead now."

Shayne waited a moment for Milly to compose herself. "I'm afraid I have bad news," he said. "Someone stole your father's original inventory."

He told her about Ostric, the reason he had gone to see him.

She took it calmly enough. "Doesn't matter anymore. The bank people can work from the copies. It's Horace who will be upset."

"Horace had a key to the safe where the inventory was kept?"

"Of course. My father trusted him completely."

Shayne plucked thoughtfully at his left earlobe. "Anyone else have access to it?"

Color crept into Milly's face.

"I did. But if you think I —"

"A million dollars can tempt anyone," Shayne said. He patted her hand. "But I don't think you had anything to do with it."

Milly's lips quivered. "Thank you."

Shayne stood up. "Stay with my secretary until this is cleared up. I don't want you getting hurt."

Milly nodded.

X

AT THE PRECINCT STATION Mike Shayne gave his account of what happened in Ostric's office, signed the statement, then looked in on Gentry. The Police Chief was up to his neck in paperwork. But he leaned back when Shayne entered.

"It's crated, ready to go," he said cryptically. Then, "I still think you're balmy. I could have a dozen good men staked out —"

"And Johnny Targa'd never come near the Museum," Shayne interrupted. "Look, Will — he's a hunter. Wary as a lioness with cubs."

"This is *Miami*!" Gentry exploded. "Not the African veldt!"

Shayne shook his head. "What's the difference, Will? Really? Men kill with guns every day."

Gentry sucked on a pipe.

Shayne said, "What happened to your cigars?"

"Doctor told me to lay off,"

Gentry growled. "After twenty years, a man gets into the habit of putting something in his mouth."

"How about lifesavers?"

Gentry snorted.

Shayne went serious. "You'll have it delivered to the museum at closing time?"

"I won't," Gentry snapped. "But it will be there. The caretaker knows what to do. He'll leave it by the back door, when he goes home."

"Make sure he does," Shayne insisted. "I don't want anyone on the grounds or in the museum, after dark."

"It isn't standard police work," Gentry growled. "And Lieutenant Rolfe doesn't like being left out of it."

"I know Rolfe," Shayne said. "I'll see that he gets the collar."

"Yeah," Gentry countered. "But who gets to bury you?"

Shayne walked to the door, looked back. "I'm a hard man to kill, Will. You ought to know."

Mike drove back to his hotel, called Lucy. "Yes, Michael," she answered. She sounded frightened. "Someone *did* call."

"The man with the hoarse voice?"

"Yes. He said, 'Tell Shayne I'll be there.'"

"That's all?"

"What are you into, Michael?"

"Tell you later, Angel," Shayne said. He hung up. Johnny Targa would be there tonight. A man

with a rifle — a man used to stalking his prey. And fifteen acres to roam in — not quite the African Congo, or the Kenya game preserves but towering, vine-festooned trees and tropical ground cover.

He called Tim Rourke. Tim sounded cheerful. "What's new, Mike?"

"I'm going headhunting," the redhead told him. Then, before Tim could absorb this, "What do you have in the morgue on a Horace Greenspan?"

"Gordon Hansen's secretary?"

"Yeah."

"I'll check it out."

"Thanks, Tim," Shayne said, and hung up.

It was still light when the detective drove his Buick through the iron gates of the Hansen Museum. Gentry had been good on his word. There was no sign of a police stakeout.

The redhead parked his car on the parking strip, rang the museum bell. The museum had closed at four. It was now close to seven-thirty. The bell echoed hollowly inside the empty hall.

Finally the door opened and the caretaker let him inside. "You're Mike Shayne?" the man asked and, when the private investigator showed him his credentials, he relaxed. But he remained dubious about the whole affair.

"If anything's missing when the bank people come in the morning," he said in a high, nasal

voice, "I'm not responsible."

He went out to his aging sedan, drove off.

Shayne was alone in the museum. The sun slanted reddening rays against the west windows. It would be dark in a few minutes.

He checked the ground floor rooms, including Milly's office, before going up to the second floor. He wanted to make sure no one except himself was in the Museum. He checked all doors and windows before turning to the small staircase leading to the third floor.

It was roped off, with a sign reading PRIVATE QUARTERS. Milly had said her father had lived up there, until his death.

The detective stepped over the rope barrier, climbed the stairs to a short hallway. The ceilings were lower here. The door was locked.

Shayne took out a small instrument for picking locks and opened it.

Gordon's study, panelled and with shuttered windows, was the way he had left it. Shayne touched the wall switch for light.

There were guns in a glass wall case, the guns Gordon had used as safari guide and hunter. The big .457 which could bring down a bull elephant hung there, along with smaller caliber game guns, pistols, Masai spears and bush blowguns.

Heads of African animals hung on the walls. A stuffed gorilla,

arms upraised, towered from a corner pedestal. The brass nameplate read: KIBBY — A MOST GENTLE FELLOW.

Gordon had had a sense of humor.

The wall safe where Gordon had kept his original inventory, along with other valuables, was hidden behind another De Voorhus painting. Johnny Targa was not in this one.

Shayne did not touch the safe. He went through the rest of the rooms, making sure that somehow Johnny Targa had not slipped in ahead of him.

Shayne relocked the door, went back to the ground floor, found his way to the museum's side door. The crate was where he had asked it to be. It was a long wooden box, not unlike a coffin. Shayne found a hammer and small pry bar and got the lid open.

He smiled at the figure inside. The police artist, he had to admit, had done a good job.

He opened the side door, looked out. It was almost pitch dark now. The moon was still on the horizon, beginning to come up over Biscayne Bay.

Shayne listened for a long moment. There were night sounds in the mini jungle just beyond, the occasional call of a night bird.

The redhead reached into the crate, pulled the dummy out, found the rifle he had requested. With them, he made a run for the covering darkness just beyond,

found himself almost immediately in another world.

Vines slapped at him, impeding his progress. Brush clawed at him. Twenty yards inside, he could have been in the Congo.

The detective made his way toward the parking lot. A fallen tree provided the setup he wanted. He set the dummy down against it. It was a department store model. The police artist had painted Shayne's face on it. The store had contributed clothing.

The decoy's arms and legs worked on joints. Shayne propped the dummy against the fallen tree so that it appeared to be crouched there, looking out across the small parking lot. Shayne taped the empty rifle to the hands of the dummy, the muzzle leveled across the tree.

The gibbous moon would be climbing above the horizon soon. The dummy wouldn't stand close inspection but it might fool someone who spotted it from a distance. And anyone coming in through the museum gates couldn't help seeing it.

Shayne glanced at his watch. Ten minutes to nine. He eased back some twenty yards from the log, into deep shadows, hunkered down to wait.

XI

THE NEAR-FULL MOON spun a silvery glow over the museum, turned the gravel parking lot into

ghostly pattern. Shayne's Buick crouched there, like some dark, patient jungle animal.

Shayne's leg muscles began to quiver. Small creatures rustled and slithered through the dank undergrowth. A bird called raucously somewhere in the "jungle" behind him, startling the redhead.

Then, somewhere in the distance, he heard a car motor cut off. Shayne held up his wrist, pressed the button on his digital watch. The numbers glowed briefly; it was nine-ten.

The dummy with Shayne's face lay crouched behind the moss-covered log, staring out across the parking lot. It waited patiently, shadowed by patches of clouds drifting across the moon's face.

Something moved in the darkness. Shayne turned as he heard the museum's side door open. It was a soft barely audible sound.

Shayne stiffened. He knew he had locked the door as he left. Had Johnny Targa interpreted his message to mean Shayne would meet him inside the building? Did Johnny have a key to the museum?

A light glowed briefly against one of the museum's second floor windows, then winked out. Whoever was up there was using a flashlight.

Shayne straightened. Something had gone wrong. Johnny was inside the museum looking for him.

He started to move toward the

building when the voice said, "Don't move, Shayne! Or I'll blow your head off!"

Shayne froze.

The voice was hoarse, dead.

Johnny Targa!

"Figured you smarter than this, Shayne," Johnny Targa said. "Staking out a dummy —"

"Johnny — listen to me," Shayne cut in. "I put that decoy there so we could talk. I didn't think you'd fall for it. I just wanted you to hold off shooting until I had a chance to talk to you."

Johnny's voice cut in: "Where is it?"

"The Crown of Orpheus? I don't know." Shayne stiffened, sweat breaking out over his big frame as:

"You said you had it!" Johnny snarled. "Damn you —"

"I said I *don't* have it." Shayne spoke quickly. "But I think I know who does."

"You're stalling!"

Shayne's attention was caught by the appearance of a light on the third floor, in Gordon's study. A brief flicker, vanishing.

"Johnny, *listen!* There's someone in the museum."

It was the wrong thing to say!

Shayne knew it as soon as he uttered it. He flung himself aside and down just as the rifle blasted. The bullet missed him by inches.

Shayne rolled quickly toward the fallen log. Johnny fired again . . . he couldn't see Shayne, but he was firing at the noise Shayne

made and he came close.

Shayne made it to the log, dove over it. A bullet thunked into the moss-covered trunk, another smashed into the back of the dummy's head.

Shayne lay behind the momentary protection of the log. He reached inside his coat, drew his .38 Magnum from his shoulder holster.

Somewhere off in the darkness Shayne heard the side door close. Whoever had been in the Museum was leaving.

Johnny's voice sound bitter. "Shayne! I told you what would happen if you tried to trap me."

Shayne kept quiet. His voice would give his position away if he spoke. He knew where Johnny was now — could almost pinpoint the spot. There was only one chance — to let the man's rage overcome his natural caution.

"I came back from the dead," Johnny said. He was beginning to move toward Shayne, toward the fallen log. But the deep shadows still made definite placement uncertain.

"Twenty-five years, Shayne . . . living in a mud and wattle hut! Dirt! Filth! Even the bushwomen wouldn't touch me." His voice choked. "You know what it's like to spend twenty-five years in hell?"

Shayne remained silent, crouched behind the fallen tree.

"Goddammit, Shayne! Where are you?"

Shayne felt around for a piece of bark that had rotted, fallen from the log. He tossed it into the brush beyond. Almost immediately a spurt of flames showed in the darkness.

Johnny was closer than he had figured!

Shayne fired at the spot where the rifle flame had blossomed. He heard Johnny gasp, heard him fall.

Shayne made a run for him. Johnny was a shadowy figure on the ground, writhing, trying to reach for the rifle which had fallen from his grasp.

Shayne stepped on the rifle butt, crouched beside the wounded man.

He was still only a shadow, vague, barely discernible: "Shayne . . . ?"

"Yeah," Shayne said. "You are Johnny Targa?"

The man on the ground turned over, lay on his back. "Underestimated you, Shayne," he said. It was an effort for the man to talk. "You . . . would have made . . . damned good white hunter . . ."

"Where'd I hit you?" the big redhead asked.

"Chest," the man said. Then, gratingly: "Been hurt before."

Somewhere in the distance a police siren sounded. It was headed their way.

"Hated to do it," Shayne said. "But you gave me no choice."

He glanced toward the museum.

The windows were dark. Nothing moved. Whoever had gone inside while he waited here for Johnny had found what he wanted, and had gone.

There was nothing he could do for Johnny Targa until the police arrived. He wasn't sure if Johnny Targa would live that long.

He said, "Johnny — there was a Crown of Orpheus?"

Johnny summoned his fading strength. "Yeah. Gordon and I found it, following one of the old Garamante trade routes. Inside an old cave . . . lots of other stuff . . . abandoned . . ." He was quiet for a moment. "Took only the crown . . . planned to go back later, but ran into bush tribe. Gordon got away . . . left me behind."

Shayne said, "Easy, Johnny. Save your strength."

The man's breathing was getting ragged. "Doesn't matter now. Got arrow in throat. That's why my voice . . ."

The police car, siren wailing, came barreling through the museum gates, swung around on the gravel parking lot. Headlights flashed, then a police spotlight began searching the dark face of the museum.

Shayne yelled, "Over here! It's me — Mike Shayne!"

A couple of uniformed men piled out of the patrol car, headed toward them, carrying shotguns.

Johnny said bitterly: "A fortune, Shayne. I gave up twenty-five years of my life for it."

"Yeah," Shayne said quietly. It was not the time to tell Johnny he could have gone about it in a more rational way. You can't tell an irrational man he is wrong. Nor could he tell a man he had just shot that, if he survived, he'd very likely face another twenty years in a prison cell.

A young patrolman came running up, flashed his light on them.

The officer said: "Shayne — you all right?"

The redhead nodded. "But he's hurt. Call an ambulance."

XII

"YEAH . . . I'M FINE, Angel," Shayne said. He was back in his hotel suite, talking to Lucy in her apartment. "I'll see you in the morning."

Milly Hansen came on the phone. "We heard about it on the late news. Thank God Johnny Targa won't be harming anyone any more."

Shayne hung up, walked to the window, stared out at the building from which Johnny Targa had first taken a shot at him. It seemed ages ago.

The redhead was beginning to feel the aftershock of his wait at the museum. He *had* been lucky.

He walked into his kitchen, took down his bottle of brandy. Johnny Targa had been taken to the nearest hospital. He was still alive the last Shayne had seen of him.

In a way, the big redhead felt

sorry for the man.

He sat down, lighted a cigaret, sipped at his brandy. It would be easy to let the case die with Johnny. No one really believed there was a Crown of Orpheus. With Johnny's capture, the pressure on the police from the Hempstead family was off.

Of course, there was still the matter of Ostric's murder. But Ostric was small time, and the neighborhood he worked in had a bad reputation. Anyone could have killed him for a variety of reasons.

Still, there was the matter of the missing inventory. And someone had set a deadly trap for him when he went to Ostric's office . . .

The brandy took its effect on the redhead. He began to relax, think more clearly.

Someone had slipped into the Museum while he waited for Johnny Targa. Someone who had a key to the Museum side door. Who? What had he, or she, been looking for?

The Crown of Orpheus?

And what had been Ostric's connection? Shayne went back, examined his first meeting with Ostric when he had shown him the inventory. The redhead was a good poker player. He was trained to read faces. He was sure now Ostric had seen that inventory listing before.

Had Ostric changed it?

It was possible. He was known locally as the cleverest forger in

the business. It was possible someone had hired him to make the change. But it wasn't until Shayne had told him how much the Crown of Orpheus was worth that Ostric realized what he had got into.

His last words to Shayne indicated his involvement. He had been doublecrossed. By whom? Horace Greenspan? Milly Hansen?

They were the logical suspects.

Milly knew about the original inventory. She had keys to the wall safe, to the museum. And she had confessed to Shayne how she felt about her father. The museum was going bankrupt, and fifteen thousand a year, in these times, hardly added up to luxurious living.

Horace Greenspan? Shayne didn't know the man. Except that Milly had told him how Horace felt about the museum. Almost as though, after her father's death, it belonged to him.

The Crown of Orpheus!

It nagged at Shayne. Someone had it. Not the museum. Someone who stood to gain a million dollars from it.

He finished his brandy and went to bed.

Lucy called him in the morning. The redhead had just finished shaving and was dressing to go to the office.

"It's Milly," Lucy said. She sounded concerned. "I think she's in trouble, Michael."

Shayne frowned. "What happened?"

"She received a phone call earlier this morning. I don't know what it was about, but it seemed to upset her terribly."

"Bad news from the hospital?" Shayne was thinking of Kenneth Hempstead.

"No. I think it was from her father's secretary, Horace Greenspan. I overheard her say, 'I'll be right over, Horace.'"

Shayne absorbed this as he slipped into his shirt. "When did she leave?"

"A few minutes ago."

Something clicked in Shayne's mind. Maybe this was the break he had been looking for.

He said, "Look up Greenspan's address for me."

"I already have," Lucy replied. She was ever the efficient secretary. "He lives on the east side, in one of those older apartment buildings." She gave Shayne the address and he jotted it down.

"Michael," Lucy cut in as he was about to hang up, "I don't know what Milly's gotten herself into — but, be nice to her . . ."

Shayne said, "Sure, Angel . . ."

He hung up, put on his coat on the way out. If he hit the lights right, he thought, he had a chance to beat Milly to Greenspan's apartment . . .

The commuter traffic delayed him. Shayne fretted as he turned onto the belt highway and found himself in the stop-and-go morn-

ing rush. He eased off at the first off-ramp and cut across to the east side, his only consolation being that Milly must be having the same problem.

The Bermuda Arms apartment building was a three-story, pink-stucco building with old palm trees in front. Residents were forced to leave their cars parked on the street, and Shayne had to drive two blocks away to find a space on a side street.

He spotted Milly Hansen's car, a new sports Triumph as he walked back. Shayne ran his palm over the hood, jerked it back. It was hot. Milly couldn't have beaten him here by more than a few minutes.

The redhead went into the apartment building, ran his gaze over the bank of mail-box slots, saw that Horace Greenspan lived in Apartment C on the third floor.

The elevator was old, slow and creaky. The floor indicator light on the panel above the door told Shayne the elevator was on the third floor. Shayne didn't wait for it to come down. He knew he could make better time taking the stairs.

He was breathing a bit hard when he topped the third floor and stepped into the hallway. A woman in hair curlers, robe and slippers was standing by the elevator, waiting for it to come back up. Music was coming from an apartment midway down the

hallway . . . strange, offbeat, with an African jungle rhythm.

She glanced at Shayne as he walked by, then the elevator door opened and she moved into it.

The door to Apartment C was ajar. The jungle music was coming from inside. Shayne pushed it open, stepped inside.

There was a small foyer and beyond it a larger living room. Milly was standing over a body lying between the couch and the coffee table. She looked frozen, horrified, a small-caliber gun clutched in her right hand . . .

She started when Shayne came up to her. The man on the floor was Horace Greenspan, and he had two bullet holes in him. It took but a glance to know he was dead.

Milly's face was white as she turned to the big private investigator. "I didn't do it," she said. Her voice was shocked, barely audible. "You must believe me. I didn't shoot him."

Shayne went back, closed the apartment door. He took out his handkerchief, wrapped it around the gun muzzle, pulled the gun gently from her hand, set it down on the coffee table.

"Sit down," Shayne said quietly. "Pull yourself together."

He went to the stereo, noticed that the record had been set on repeat. The music had probably been turned on to cover the shots that killed Greenspan. He shut it off, looked inside the bedroom.

Nothing seemed to be disturbed. Horace Greenspan was a neat, fussy sort of man. He did his own housekeeping.

Milly was staring at the body when Shayne walked back to her.

"Tell me about it," Shayne said.

She looked up at him. "Horace called me this morning. He said it was urgent. Something to do with the museum."

"The Crown of Orpheus?"

She shook her head. "He didn't say. Only that it was important — that he had to see me right away."

Shayne frowned. Someone had beaten Milly here, killed Horace, taken the Crown of Orpheus. Who? Milly couldn't have —

"Did you see anyone leave the building as you came in?" Shayne asked her.

Milly shook her head. "I might have . . . but I wasn't paying any attention."

She pulled her eyes away from the body, began to tremble. She looked ill.

Shayne put a hand on her shoulder. "I believe you. Go home. I'll take care of things here."

"I can't," she said. "I can't go home now. I don't want to be alone."

"Go to the hospital, then," Shayne said. "I'll call Lucy. She'll join you."

He pulled her to her feet, escorted her to the door. "Wait for me there."

She looked at him, her eyes dull.

"Who, Shayne? Who would kill Horace? Why? Johnny Targa's in police custody."

"I'm not sure," Shayne told her. "Not yet." He pushed her outside.

"Drive carefully. I'll talk to you later — at the office."

He waited until he saw her step into the elevator as it came up, disgorging the woman in curlers. The woman glanced at Milly, at Shayne, shrugged, disappeared into her apartment with the morning newspaper.

Shayne went back to Greenspan, searched the body. He found nothing. Whoever had killed Gordon's secretary had left no trace.

There was a phone on an antique white desk with gold trim. A woman's desk. A phone number written down on a pad beside it . . . doodles had been scrawled around it, almost obliterating it.

Shayne dialed the number on the pad. He was not too surprised at who answered. He asked a few questions, said: "Thank you very much, ma'am," and hung up.

He stared blankly at the wall for a long moment. A picture of a big smiling man appeared there — jovial, affable. A man he had liked.

He called the police, asked to be put through to Chief Gentry.

Gentry didn't ask too many questions. He said: "I'll have Lieutenant Rolfe meet you there."

The airport was crowded. Men and women jostled each other,

some searching for help with their baggage, others carrying their own. Security guards kept a discreet watch.

Flight 169 to Jamaica was just boarding.

Shayne cut across the waiting room to intercept the big black man carrying a pigskin Boston bag.

"Dr. Joyner."

The big man paused, turned slowly to face Shayne. "Mike Shayne." A smile flashed across his handsome face. "What are you doing here?"

"Looking for you," Shayne said.

The big man looked puzzled. "Are you going to Jamaica?"

"No."

Dr. Joyner's face hardened. "I'm sorry, Shayne. But I don't have time to chat with you."

"Take time!" the big redhead snapped. "Tell me about the Crown of Orpheus." He pointed to the pigskin bag in Joyner's hand. "Who are you taking it to, Jimmy?"

Dr. Joyner stiffened. "I don't know what you're talking about. I'm on a leave of absence. I'm taking a vacation — a well-deserved one, I may say."

He moved to brush Shayne aside. Shayne stopped him. "Sorry," Shayne said. "You'll have to postpone it."

He pointed to Lieutenant Rolfe and two security guards coming toward them.

For a moment, the big black man seemed about to make a break for it. Then he shrugged.

"How did you know, Shayne?"

"Matter of elimination,"

Shayne answered. "Little things — like a phone number in Horace Greenspan's apartment, a University number. And a newspaper clipping, dating back to when Gordon Hansen first opened the museum to the public.

"Gordon mentioned the Crown of Orpheus then, but in your interview you said there was no such antiquity. Later, when I talked to you, you told me you were one of the few who believed it existed. A slip of the tongue, Doctor . . . or just professional egotism?"

Joyner shrugged. "A bit of both," he said. He set the bag down as Rolfe and the security men came up. "I want to call my lawyer, Shayne . . .

"It was Horace Greenspan's idea to contact Dr. Joyner," Shayne told Lucy and Milly later, in his office. "He had met Dr. Joyner at the Museum's opening. He knew of the Crown's existence then." Shayne lighted a cigaret. "When your father died, he and Dr. Joyner made plans to cash in on it.

"The museum was going bankrupt. No one else knew of the existence of the valuable antiquity. However, it was listed on the original inventory. So they had Ostrich change it, substituting a minor artifact in its place. It

seemed foolproof. No one would be looking for something that wasn't there."

"Until Johnny Targa showed up," Milly said.

Shayne nodded. "That complicated things. And when I went to see Ostric and told him what the Crown was worth, they had to get rid of *him*. Quite likely Ostric tried to blackmail them."

Milly shuddered. "And all the while I thought some crazy man —"

"I think that's when Horace Greenspan got cold feet," Shayne interrupted. "With a crazy white hunter on the loose, and Ostric getting killed." The big redhead shrugged. "Dr. Joyner must have suspected Horace was ready to back out and —"

"Dr. Joyner killed him?" Lucy said.

Shayne nodded. "I think the police will be able to trace that gun to him. And they'll find the same gun was used to kill Ostric."

"But my fingerprints," Milly exclaimed. "They must be on that gun —"

"No," Shayne said quietly. "I wiped them off before I called the police."

"Dr. Joyner was a brilliant man," Lucy said thoughtfully. "Why would he jeopardize his position at the University, his career?"

Shayne shrugged. "A million dollars is a terrible inducement," he replied. The redhead stood up, butted out his cigaret.

"See you ladies later," he said.

Lucy called after him as Shayne moved to leave. "Where are you going?"

Shayne looked back, grinned. "I've got a speaking engagement at that Women's Lib club, remember? And you wouldn't want me to disappoint them, would you?"

The two women looked at each other as Shayne waved and went out. ●





The Nameless Crime

by EDWARD D. HOCH

When George Dorian's portrait begins to age on exhibit, Dorian goes to Policewoman Connie Trent for help — and signs his own death warrant.

CONNIE TRENT HAD GONE to high school with George Dorian and had even casually dated him. The family was a vague blur of a sister she had never met, a father who died when the children were young, and a mother with drinking problems. But she remembered George as an intense young man who talked of going to college and then on to Harvard Business School.

When we phoned to ask her to lunch that day, it had been years since she had even thought of him. Now, hearing his voice, she had a fleeting curiosity about what he had become, twelve years out of high school. "Sure, I'll meet you," she agreed readily.

"The Silver Lion? At noon?"

"Great! You still look the same?"

"You'll recognize me," he said.

"See you at noon."

Captain Leopold was out, so she poked her head into Fletcher's office to tell him she would be taking an early lunch. "Big date?" he asked.

"Something like that. A boy I went to high school with. I didn't even know he was back in town."

"Good luck. Don't stay out all afternoon."

As soon as she saw George Dorian standing in the doorway of the Silver Lion, she wondered how she could ever have thought of him as a boy. He was slim and

dark and handsome in a conservative blue suit with vest, looking like one of those rising business executives in the Chamber of Commerce ads.

"Hello, George," she said, extending her hand.

He took it in both of his. "Connie! I was about to say you haven't changed a bit, but you have. You're more lovely than ever. Police work must agree with you."

She merely smiled, embarrassed as usual by compliments about her appearance. When the headwaiter had led them to a table she said, "And what are you doing these days, George? I must admit I hadn't realized you were living in town."

"I just returned last summer. Got transferred up here when City Investing opened a new branch office."

"You're a stockbroker?"

"Well, an investment banker. It's not exactly the same thing. We deal mainly in the underwriting of new securities."

She gave him an impish grin she rarely used since her college days. "I should have known from the conservative blue suit."

He laughed and suggested a drink before lunch. "Just one," she agreed. "I have to go back on duty."

"How is the police business these days?"

"It's always good."

"Weren't you going in for

sociology after high school?"

She nodded. "I have my degree from Columbia. But somehow, after college, I drifted back here and ended up as an undercover narcotics agent."

"My God — that's dangerous!"

"It was, for a while. Then my cover was blown and I joined the Department as a regular police-woman, working with addicts. Five years ago I went to work for Captain Leopold in Violent Crimes. That's the story of my life, up to age thirty."

"You've still got the biggest brown eyes I ever saw."

"The better to see you with."

"Married?"

"No. How about you?"

"Married and divorced already. We move fast these days."

"Anyone I knew?"

"No. Met her at college. She still lives in New York." The drinks arrived and he downed half of his in the first gulp. "What can I say? I needed that."

"I guess so. Does investment banking cause ulcers?"

"No, but drinking does." His face grew serious. "Connie — called you because I didn't know anyone else I could trust to help me. I've got a little problem."

"Oh?"

"It's nothing, really. A stupid thing. But are you allowed to moonlight after hours? I'd pay you for your time, of course."

"Pay me for doing what?"

"Guard duty. A simple thing.

Sometimes I see off-duty cops providing security at rock concerts and sporting events."

"Yes, that's done," she agreed. "Some cities have a policy against it, but we don't. The administration feels it provides for the public safety while supplementing our pay at the same time. I've never done any of it, though. You need a man in uniform for guard duty."

"In this situation a woman out of uniform might be better."

"Oh?"

"I saw you on the TV news a few weeks back, and when this thing came up I naturally thought of you. Are you familiar with the portraits of an artist named Naomi Jacobs?"

"I've seen the name. She's exhibiting here in town, isn't she?"

"Correct — at the Arts Center. Her portraits have been on display since October first."

"Is she a local artist?"

"She lives in New York. I've known her for years, and I went to her when my company wanted a portrait for their fancy brochure. You know the sort — rising young executive. I was pleased, too, of course. I'm thinking of entering politics and a good image never hurts."

She tried to imagine him in a political career. He was certainly handsome enough, and his deep blue eyes would be popular with the ladies. The portrait he showed

her, on an inside page of a glossy brochure, was a head-and-shoulders painting apparently done in oils. It was realistic enough to grace a campaign poster.

"Anyway," he continued, "this portrait is one of those on exhibit at the Arts Center. And that's what I need you for."

"To guard the portrait?" she asked with a smile, still not believing it.

He nodded. "Someone has been tampering with it, changing it. I'll swear it almost doesn't look like me any more."

"Come now, George! Why would anyone do that?"

"I don't know, and that's what I want to find out. A regular uniformed guard would only scare them away, but if I could hire you to watch over it, you might be able to catch them in the act."

"How much longer will the exhibit be in town?"

"Five more weeks — through the end of November."

She shook her head. "I just can't believe anyone would tamper with your picture. What could they hope to gain?"

"If you don't believe it, come with me after lunch and see for yourself."

While they ate, the conversation turned to their classmates from high school and the times they had had during those happy days twelve years earlier. Connie filled him in on some of the people she had kept track of, and he did

the same thing for her.

"Who'd have thought you'd have ended up a policewoman!" he marveled. "It's certainly my good fortune."

After lunch she accompanied him to the Arts Center exhibit hall, where the exhibition entitled *Portraits by Naomi Jacobs* was attracting a scatter of afternoon viewers. Glancing through the catalogue, she noted that the portrait of George Dorian was number 33.

They passed down a row of distinguished-looking men, mostly older than George, and a small scattering of women, mostly the type that reflected fashionable wealth. One woman had posed with her horse, another with her two sons.

"Here it is," he announced, pausing before portrait number 33.

The first sight of it shocked Connie. It was quite different from the picture in the company brochure. There were deep lines in the face and haggard circles under the eyes. The hair was streaked with white. Even the eyes seemed a different color — a light hazel.

She stared at it a full minute before she heard him say softly, "It's worse than yesterday."

And then she realized what it was.

George Dorian's portrait was growing old.

CAPTAIN LEOPOLD looked up

from his desk when Connie poked her head around the corner of the door. "Got a minute, Captain?"

"Sure. It's just about coffee time anyway."

She brought two steaming cups from the temperamental machine in the hallway and settled down in the chair opposite his desk. "I was wondering what you'd think of me doing a little moonlighting."

He smiled at the idea. "Guarding the rock concert? Those kids'd run right over you."

"No, it's guarding a portrait at the Arts Center exhibition." She told him about her old classmate and the mysterious changes in his picture.

She saw the sparkle of interest in Leopold's eyes as she talked. Finally he asked, "You say your friend's name is George Dorian?"

"That's right. Do you know him?"

"No, but doesn't anything strike you as strange?"

"The whole thing strikes me as strange."

"Remember Oscar Wilde's novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*?"

"Of course! He had a portrait in his attic or someplace that grew old and horrible, reflecting his evil life, while he remained young and handsome. And *Dorian* is even spelled the same way! But what can it mean?"

"Probably that someone is going to great lengths to carry out an elaborate practical joke."

"The thing is interesting me more all the time, Captain. I'd like to help him out on it."

"The department has no policy against moonlighting of that sort, though I'll admit it's usually the male officers that take it on. Be careful. It's the sort of oddity that could lead to trouble."

She finished her coffee and thanked him. "I'll keep you advised," she said.

George Dorian had explained to her that the Arts Center maintained its own guard during most of the hours it was open. There was also a woman at the entrance desk to collect the small admission fee and answer questions. But for two hours, between five-thirty and seven-thirty, both the woman and the guard ate dinner in turn, with the other covering the desk alone. It was likely that the defacing of Dorian's painting occurred during this two-hour evening period.

Connie usually went off duty between four and five, so she had plenty of time to reach the Arts Center before five-thirty. On the first evening of her assignment the woman at the desk greeted her with a smile.

"Hello. Welcome to the exhibit. There's no admission charge but we do ask a fifty-cent donation for our arts booklet. You'll find a catalogue of the portraits on exhibition plus news of other Arts Center events."

"Thank you." Connie handed the woman two quarters.

The exhibit hall was divided into three rooms, with George Dorian's portrait in the farthest room. Connie had established on her earlier visit that it could easily be tampered with, out of sight of the front desk.

When the guard went to dinner at five-thirty, she stationed herself in the middle room, finding a bench which gave her a view of anyone who approached the Dorian portrait. She busied herself with the booklet and pretended to ignore the few patrons who strolled about studying the paintings.

Connie quickly discovered it was a quiet time for the gallery. Only two women and a young man wandered through during the two-hour period, and none of them gave more than a passing glance to the Dorian portrait. When she returned for a second night the woman at the desk seemed surprised to see her again. "Do you know the artist?" she asked.

The woman smiled as she spoke and Connie's eyes went to the name tag on her blouse. *Mona Frank*. "I've never met her," Connie answered, "but I know one of her subjects."

Mona Frank nodded. "That would be George Dorian? I saw you in here with him the other day?"

"You're very observant."

"I have nothing to do but sit here counting people and selling brochures, from two in the after-

noon till nine at night."

"I went to high school with him, here in town. We're old friends."

"He seems like a nice man."

This time, when Connie passed through the middle room to the back, she noticed at once the change in the portrait. The lines of the face were deeper, the hair seemed grayer and more coarse. And there was a diabolic redness about the eyes.

She took a deep breath and studied the picture with care. There could be no mistake — it *had changed* since the previous evening.

Connie went back out to the desk and asked the woman, "Have you noticed anything odd about the Dorian portrait?"

"Odd? You don't mean it's been damaged?"

"Come see for yourself."

Mona Frank followed Connie into the back room and stood for a moment staring at the painting in question. "Well, I haven't really examined it since the exhibit opened, but it certainly seems to have changed. What's happened to it?"

"George Dorian thinks someone's been tampering with it. He hired me to watch it. I'm an off-duty policewoman."

"I see." Mona Frank spoke just a bit stiffly. "I do wish he'd brought his complaint to me before taking such action. We have the reputation of the Arts Center to think of." She leaned forward

to inspect the pigments more closely. "It almost looks as if this is an underpainting coming through."

"What's that?" Connie asked.

"The original painting on the canvas, which has been covered over by subsequent painting. There are occasional examples of such practice in Europe, even among the masters."

"You mean George Dorian's face was painted in this old and ugly manner first and then painted over as he is now?"

"I'm only guessing. But it looks as if that might be the case."

Connie decided there was no point remaining on guard. She needed to see Dorian and tell him what she had learned.

"Thank you, Miss Frank. You've been a big help."

She left the Arts Center and hurried to her car.

GEORGE DORIAN LISTENED in silence while she told him what little she had learned. "So it just seems to me that guarding the painting will do no good, George. What's happening to it is apparently being caused by the pigments Naomi Jacobs used when she painted it."

He stared down at the half-empty glass in front of him. He had come at once in answer to her phone call, meeting her at the Silver Lion again. But this time he seemed quiet and withdrawn, listening to her report without

emotion. Watching him finish his drink with a few quick swallows, she wondered if he had been drinking earlier.

"Then you don't want to continue on this," he said, sensing her mood.

"Not really, George. If this woman has done something to your painting, it's between you and her. I'm convinced no one is tampering with it at the Arts Center, and the woman there — Mona Frank — agrees with me."

"I wish you hadn't brought her into it."

"I'm sorry, but it seemed the likely thing to do. I thought she might have seen something."

He somehow signaled the waitress for another drink and, when she arrived with it, started in at once. "Forgive me," he said. "I've had a bad day and your news hasn't helped any."

"Anything else I can do to help?"

"No," he decided after a moment's thought. "It's something I have to handle myself."

"Perhaps I should go then."

She moved to rise but he laid a restraining hand on her arm. "There *is* one thing. Could you come with me to see a man now, this evening?"

"What man?"

"Hank Bloom. He operates Sport Ranges."

Connie had heard of the place. It was a suburban complex for target shooting of all types, with

rifle and pistol ranges, archery and even an adjoining golf driving range that was lighted at night.

"What's he got to do with this?"

"He's just a friend," Dorian replied vaguely. "Come on." He finished the second drink and laid some bills on the table between them.

She followed him out to the car with growing reluctance. She didn't want to visit Hank Bloom at Sport Ranges, and she especially didn't want to make the trip in George's car. "Are you sure you can drive? You drank those two pretty fast."

"Don't worry about me. When we were in high school I could drive home blind drunk."

"This isn't high school, George. At least let me do the driving."

He finally relented and she took the wheel, steering them out on the Post Road toward the Sport Ranges complex. The October dark came early, and by the time they reached the place the lights of the golf driving range lit up the sky like a beacon.

The fresh air seemed to have sobered Dorian a bit, and his walk was reasonably steady as he led her to the booth where a cigar-smoking individual kept watch on the customers while glancing over a scratch sheet from a nearby race track.

"Hello, Felix. Is Hank around?"

"In the shootin' gallery. How

you been getting along?

"Can't complain."

Connie felt the man's eyes pass over her body, and when she caught up to George Dorian she asked, "Who's that creep?"

"He works for Hank. He's harmless."

They entered the side door of the pistol range and Connie immediately covered her ears against the deafening crack of handguns. Dorian took a pack of cigarets from his pocket and broke off the filter tips on four of them. He placed one in each of his ears and handed her the other two.

"Put them in your ears. They'll help muffle the sound."

She did as he suggested and was surprised that it worked. Not as well as the ear protectors she wore on the police pistol range, of course, but enough to make the noise bearable. Dorian had gone ahead to intercept a shaggy-haired man carrying a Colt .45 pistol who was about to enter one of the cubicles on the firing line.

"Connie, this is Hank Bloom. He runs the place." Bloom nodded a greeting and waited for some explanation. "Connie Trent. She's an old friend from high school," Dorian added.

"You want to see me about something?" Bloom asked above the crack of gunshots.

"Yeah — if you've got a few minutes."

The shaggy-haired man motioned toward a glassed-in office

area and they followed him. Inside, the thick glass and sound-proofed walls diminished the gunfire to distant popping.

"Can't hear yourself think out there," he said, taking a seat behind the desk. "Now, what can I do for you, George?"

Dorian slipped the cigaret filters out of his ears and Connie did likewise. "I need to talk to Naomi," he said.

"So talk to her."

"She's not at her New York studio. Hasn't been for days. I've been trying to reach her."

Hank Bloom lit a cigaret, squinting to study Dorian's face for a moment through the smoke. "You're looking old, George. It's getting you down, isn't it?"

"Where is she, Hank?"

"Suppose I tell you. What would you do?"

"Go and talk to her. Find out why she's doing this to me."

"Oh, I think you know that, George."

Dorian was silent for a moment, and the gunfire was suddenly louder. Connie turned and saw that Felix, the man with the cigar, had entered the office. He closed the door behind him and said, "Boss, there's a detective snoopin' around outside."

Hank Bloom shot a glance at Dorian and Connie. "Don't bother me now, Felix. See what he wants."

"I know what he wants. It's that Lieutenant Fletcher I was

tellin' you about."

Connie perked up at the mention of Fletcher. Had he somehow followed her there? Dorian saw that the name meant something to her and he asked, "Friend of yours?"

"I work with him."

Hank Bloom crushed out his cigaret. "You're a cop?"

"A policewoman," Connie replied. "But I'm off duty now."

"What is this anyway?" he asked Dorian. "You trying to set me up for something?"

"No. I just want to know where Naomi Jacobs is."

"Felix, bring this Fletcher in and let's get to the bottom of things."

The cigar-smoking man nodded and went out, returning in a moment with Lieutenant Fletcher in tow. It amused Connie to see his eyes widen when he spotted her. "Hello there," she greeted him casually.

"How come you're here, Connie?" he asked, shooting a glance at George Dorian.

"Just taking in the sights."

"You wanted to see me Lieutenant?" Hank Bloom asked. "Make it fast, please. We'll be closing soon."

Fletcher scowled at him. Connie had seen the look many times, and she knew it meant trouble for the man behind the desk. "Well, mister, you just might have to stay open a while longer tonight. You see, a kid just out of high school

tried to rob a liquor store in town tonight. All he got for his trouble was a bullet in the leg. But he tells me the .32 revolver he was carrying came from you. He says he bought it here."

"I've been known to sell weapons to collectors," Bloom answered carefully.

"Did you ever sell one to a nineteen-year-old kid without a license?"

"Never!"

"He says you did. Says you charged him seventy-five bucks."

"He must be mistaken. Maybe I sold it to a collector who turned around and sold it to him."

Fletcher leaned across the desk. "Look, Bloom, this isn't the first time we've heard about you downtown. We just might have you this time."

"You're a city cop, Fletcher. You're out of your territory here. Get lost!"

For an instant Connie was afraid Fletcher would take a poke at the man, but he relaxed and straightened up. "Okay, you'll be hearing from us, Bloom."

As Fletcher headed for the door Connie said, "I should be going, too."

George Dorian laid a hand on her shoulder. "I'll take you home."

"All right." She was anxious to speak with Fletcher, but she was just as anxious to hear what Dorian had to say.

As soon as they left Bloom —

with George Dorian promising to call him in the morning — Connie asked, "What's your connection with those men? They're nothing but criminals!"

"Why? Just because your friend Fletcher says they are? I'll admit I don't know too much about Felix, but Hank Bloom is just a businessman trying to make a buck. I doubt if he's selling guns to criminals."

"But what's your connection with him?"

"He's a friend of Naomi Jacobs. She only met him last month when she was here setting up the exhibit, but she's always been impulsive. She'd be working nights, alone at the Arts Center, and he'd pick her up and take her to the motel where she was staying. When I couldn't reach her in New York I thought of him."

"What motel did she stay at last month?"

"The Campus, but she's not there now. I checked with them first."

"I had the impression, from your conversation with Bloom, that he might have replaced you as Naomi's lover."

He flushed at her words. "Anything between me and Naomi was over long ago."

"Could it have left a bitterness that caused her to play that trick with the portrait?"

"I don't know," he answered, looking away.

"Suppose I could locate her for you."

"You mean it?"

"I don't know. Maybe. Let me check it out and if I'm right I'll phone you later tonight."

He took one of her hands. "I appreciate everything you're doing, Connie. I don't know how to thank you."

"Wait till you've got something to thank me for."

She picked up her car at the police lot and drove out to the Campus Motel. It was a popular college hangout, across the street from the dorms, and Connie had a friend on the night staff. Since most of the guests were visitors at the college, she didn't think it would be difficult spotting one who wasn't. Naomi Jacobs might have been anywhere, of course, but if she wasn't in New York Connie was betting she was up here, close at hand to the aging portrait.

The Arts Center brochure had included a small photograph of her, and the night desk clerk recognized the face at once. "Sure, Connie. She's in room three forty-two. Use the house phone over there."

The voice that answered the phone was wary. "Who did you say it was?"

"Connie Trent. I'm a police officer, Miss Jacobs, but I'm not on official business. It's about your exhibit at the Arts Center."

There was a moment's silence and then, "Very well. Come on up."

Naomi Jacobs was better looking than her photograph — a handsome, well-tailored young woman in her late twenties. Her brown hair was fashionably styled and she wore rimless glasses with a slight tint over light brown eyes. "Now what's this about?" she asked.

"I think you have an idea, Miss Jacobs. It's about the portrait of George Dorian."

"Oh?"

"It's suffered some sort of damage. The top layer of paint is slowly dissolving, revealing an underpainting in which Dorian appears much older. It's as if the painting was aging, growing more corrupt, like Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray*."

"How utterly amazing!"

"It shouldn't be all that amazing to you, Miss Jacobs. That underpainting could only have been done by the original artist. Why are you doing this to George Dorian?"

"I'm doing nothing to him."

"Then why are you hiding here in a motel room under an assumed name?"

"I'm hardly hiding, since you located me so easily."

"That was luck."

"Does George Dorian know I'm here?"

"No."

"Please don't tell him."

"I won't, if you'll explain to me about the painting."

"I know nothing about the

painting." She turned away, toward the window, began pacing the floor.

"The underpainting had to be done by you, without Dorian's knowledge." She remained silent and Connie persisted. "He's anxious to find you. When he couldn't reach you in New York he went out to see Hank Bloom."

Naomi Jacobs stiffened at the name. "What for?"

"He thought Bloom might know how to reach you."

"Bloom means nothing to me."

"Dorian thinks differently."

"George Dorian has no hold on me. No man has."

"But it was different at one time, wasn't it?" Connie asked, taking a chance. "You were lovers once, weren't you? Before you painted his portrait."

The young woman let out her breath in a soft sigh. It was like the air escaping from a dead balloon. "Yes, we were lovers. He told you that much, did he?"

"He told me nothing. But that painting thing seems too elaborate for a mere practical joke. It seems more the revenge of a woman scorned."

Naomi Jacobs sat down again. "We were lovers and he left me pregnant. I had an abortion and never told him."

"These days things like that happen," Connie said. "Do you still hate him so much for it?"

"Hate and love can be very close, I suppose."

"And what about Hank Bloom?"

"When I was here last month setting up the exhibit, George took me out to Sport Ranges one night and I met him. After that he used to pick me up at the Arts Center after I finished arranging the paintings."

"Tell me what you did to Dorian's portrait."

"No."

"Is it simply a joke or some bizarre punishment?"

"I told you what he did."

"And you've been hiding here all week, tormenting him."

"I'm doing what I have to," she said. "Please go now."

There was nothing more for Connie to say. The young woman had defaced a portrait she herself owned. She had committed no crime. Neither had anyone else.

"I think he's suffered enough," she said as she went out the door. "Try leaving him alone."

Connie drove home to her apartment and went to bed. She dreamed of melting portraits and shooting galleries and woke at seven to the ringing of her telephone.

It was Lieutenant Fletcher, calling to tell her that George Dorian had been found shot to death in his car.

CAPTAIN LEOPOLD WAS already at the scene with Fletcher by the time Connie arrived. Dorian's car was parked off the

road on a street just inside the city limits. She remembered they had come this way on the previous night, on the way to Sport Ranges.

"Is this the man you were moonlighting for?" Leopold asked. She could tell from his voice that he hadn't yet had his morning coffee.

"This is George Dorian, yes." She looked down at the body sprawled across the front seat of the car she had occupied only hours before. Dried blood covered the left ear and cheek.

"Shot once in the left temple at close range," Leopold said, "apparently by someone who was behind the wheel at the time."

Connie tried to forget that it was George, from high school, and view it as just another murder victim. Her stomach was weak and she was glad she hadn't stopped for breakfast. "What's that in his ear?"

"Damnedest thing I ever saw," Fletcher answered. "We think it's a cigaret filter, and there's one in the other ear too. We don't want to remove them till the boys get their pictures."

"Here's something else," Leopold said, holding out a pair of folded letters. "Did he say anything to you about being blackmailed?"

"No."

"These were tucked in his wallet. They're both short. Listen. *If they knew what you did, they wouldn't want you for an invest-*

ment banker or anything else. It's signed *Basil Hallward*. The second one says, *'There'll be no political career for you when I tell them what you did.'* Same signature. Both undated, both typed. Any ideas?"

"Not a one. Naomi Jacobs disliked him and I don't think Hank Bloom was too friendly, either. But this Basil Hallward seems to be speaking of some nameless crime."

"A nameless crime — exactly. A perfect target for blackmail."

Connie saw what he was getting at. "You think he met the blackmailer in his car and was shot?"

"Blackmailers don't shoot," Leopold said. "Not unless they're cornered. What's your idea?"

Connie took a deep breath of morning air. "Those ear filters — I don't think he was killed in this car."

"Why not?" Leopold shot back.

They had to step aside while the police photographer moved in, snapping the body and the car from various angles. Connie spoke quickly, telling Leopold and Fletcher everything that had happened during the past two days, with special emphasis on the events of the previous night.

"Don't you see? For some reason he went back to that shooting range. He was killed there. That's why he had the cigaret filters back in his ears."

Leopold thought about it. "Fletcher, go pick up Hank Bloom

and bring him in for questioning. And have someone swing by the Campus Motel for Naomi Jacobs, too."

They spent the rest of the morning and part of the afternoon questioning the artist and Bloom. Both denied any knowledge of the murder. At one point Bloom's employee, Felix Landon, was brought in for questioning, too, and he sat through the whole session with a cigar in his mouth, speaking around it when he needed to answer.

"I don't know," Leopold said at last, drinking one of his eternal cups of coffee. "Robbery wasn't the motive, so I doubt if it was a hitchhiker. It was someone he knew, someone he allowed into his car."

"What about the cigaret filters?" Connie asked. "Why are you so convinced he died in the car?"

Leopold took out a little plastic evidence bag containing the two filters. "Notice anything about these?"

Connie turned over the bag in her hands, studying the filters. "Just two plain white filters. I saw him break them off the ciga-rets myself, earlier in the evening. He gave me a couple, too. They weren't all that effective, but they helped some."

Leopold nodded. "I once knew a cop used to stick empty cartridge cases in his ears on the pistol range. But the new ear protectors

are a whole lot better."

"What is it I'm supposed to notice about these filters?"

Before Leopold could answer, they were interrupted by the ringing telephone. He answered and handed the instrument to her. The voice on the other end was familiar.

"Miss Trent? This is Mona Frank at the Arts Center. I thought you'd want to know that I just came on duty and discovered the portrait of George Dorian is missing. It's been cut out of its frame and stolen!"

CONNIE LEFT LEOPOLD'S office and drove at once to the Arts Center. There was something bizarre about the theft of the portrait at this time, as if someone wanted to destroy both the man and his image together. When she met Mona Frank at the entrance, her first question was, "Could it have been stolen during the night?"

"I suppose so," Mona Frank replied. "If the thief had a key to the place. There was no sign of a forced entry."

"You know that George Dorian was found murdered this morning?"

She nodded. "I heard it on the news."

"What time did you come on duty?"

"About an hour ago, when we opened at two o'clock."

Conne went back to look at the

frame that had held the missing painting. The cutting of the canvas had been skillful, done with a sharp blade held in a steady hand. She glanced at the other portraits, but nothing else had been damaged. The thief had known exactly what he was after. "Did you ever have anything like this happen before?"

"Never!"

"It can't have any great commercial value, can it? I mean, it's not a Rembrandt. Besides, it was damaged."

Mona Frank agreed. "The portraits are insured for five hundred dollars each, and it's difficult to imagine anyone but the subject or a family member paying even that much for them."

"I'll file a report on this," Connie assured her. "Thank you for calling me."

She drove back to Headquarters, more baffled than ever. When she found Leopold and Fletcher together, she filled them in on the details.

"It makes no sense to me," she admitted. "The portrait wasn't stolen for its value, so it must have been stolen because of that tampering with the face. Naomi Jacobs all but admitted she was responsible. Could she have stolen it in fear I'd arrest her?"

"What about this Mona Frank? She had access to the painting."

"But no possible motive that I can see."

Leopold leaned back and closed his eyes for a moment. "Still, this might be the break we've needed. What if there was something more to that painting than what you saw? What if the murderer had to remove it after killing Dorian?"

"Something more? Like what?"

"I'm not sure of that part."

Connie was remembering something. She was remembering the hazel eyes in that underpainting. But she couldn't quite put her thoughts into words. Not yet. Instead she asked, "What about Bloom? Did you confront him with those cigaret filters?"

"We let Bloom go. The filters only mean the killer found them while searching for something. Maybe those blackmail letters. They could easily have been overlooked in that wallet."

"The letters from Basil Hallward!"

"Exactly."

"But who is he?"

"I went back and read the first part of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*," Leopold said. "You should have done the same. In Wilde's novel, Basil Hallward was the artist who painted the picture."

SHE WAS WAITING for them down the hall, in one of the little interrogation rooms. Connie went in first, alone, while Leopold and Fletcher listened in from the next room.

"Hello, Naomi," she said,

sitting down across the table from the artist. "How are you feeling?"

"Sad," Naomi Jacobs replied. "Drained."

"You killed him, didn't you? You'd threatened to blackmail him about something. Last night when I went to see you, he followed me and found you. You went with him in the car and he even let you drive. But even your threats couldn't bring him back, so you shot him."

"Yes," the woman replied. "That's true. Everything I did was to get him back, but he wouldn't come."

"You went through his pockets in the car, looking for those notes, and you found the cigaret filters. You'd been out to Hank Bloom's range with him once, so you knew his habit of using the filters as ear plugs. You put them in his ears, hoping we'd think he was shot at Sport Ranges."

"You fooled me, but you didn't fool Captain Leopold. He noticed there was blood from the head wound in the left ear, but the filters had no bloodstains on them. That meant they'd been put into the ears *after* the shooting, after the blood had time to dry. You must have sat in the car a long time with his body, Naomi."

"I was remembering how it had been with us."

"The name on the threatening notes was that of the character in Oscar Wilde's novel who painted Dorian Gray's picture. George

knew you sent them. He knew what you were doing to his portrait. And that's why he was trying to find you.

"After you killed him you stole the picture because it could be evidence against you. I think you kept a key to the Arts Center from when you were working late arranging the exhibit last month. That's how you were able to get in there at night and gradually remove the outer layer of the painting."

She stirred in her chair, turning to face Connie for the first time. There might have been madness in her eyes, or only a desperate need to pour out her story to another human being. "I loved

him. God, how I loved him! All my life, even when we were separated."

"Who was the man in the underpainting, Naomi? It wasn't meant to be Dorian because the eyes were hazel instead of blue. They were the color of your eyes."

"It was my father. I painted it years ago from memory, and then I painted George's head over it."

"Your father?" Connie asked. She heard the door open behind her. Leopold and Fletcher were coming in. They had heard enough.

Naomi Jacobs looked up at them, and then back at Connie. "My father, George's father. George Dorian was my brother." ●



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The Greedy Landlord

by MARILYN WHITESIDE

Eb Cresap's murder was one case the Hamrock chief of police hoped would never be solved.

AFTER EB CRESAP'S DEATH, just about everyone in Hamrock spoke kindly of him. It seemed the only decent thing to do. When he was alive, residents of the small Maine town had been inclined to describe him as a penny-pinching cheat who brought his pagan conscience to church each Sunday only because a show of piety was known to be good for business.

The biggest complaint against him was his treatment of his tenants. Ebner Cresap owned five apartment buildings in Hamrock

and nearby Sayerville — and although he toed the line in honoring leases, he apparently felt no qualms whatsoever about ignoring needed repairs and withholding rent deposits.

He was particularly ruthless in his dealings with the vulnerable — invalids, women living alone and tenants who moved to another state and could not return to take him to small claims court. The rumor around town was that he was similarly lacking in kindness toward his wife, a pale slip of a

woman with a soft smile and perpetually downcast eyes.

So when Eb's body was found on his poultry farm, deep in chicken droppings with its head smashed in, the people of Hamrock noted — privately — that the murder couldn't have happened to a more deserving person.

Police Chief Warren Pease, who had arrived in Hamrock only six months earlier, began his investigation by interviewing the widow, Lydia Cresap, but she couldn't think of anyone who had threatened her husband or tried to recoup a rent deposit, at least not for several months. Former tenants were frequently angry with Eb, she meekly conceded, but no one to her knowledge had mentioned murder.

"Ebner always said let 'em scream," she remembered. "They'd feel better for getting it out of their system, and he'd still have the money."

"Well, ma'am," the police chief was uncomfortably aware that the widow hadn't even once looked directly at him during their conversation, "I do have the coroner's report. If you'd like to know the cause of death and so forth, I'll be happy . . . willing to read to read it to you."

"Yes, I'd appreciate that, Chief Pease." She studied her clasped hands carefully.

"Well, ma'am, he was killed by a number of blows on the head. The murderer used a small piece

of the lumber that was stacked up by the side of the chicken house. The blows weren't hard, ma'am. A child could have done it. We figure that the first blow was well-placed — maybe just a lucky aim — and it stunned him. Then, while he was down, the murderer kept on hitting away until . . . the job was done."

Warren was a sensitive man, and it disturbed him to realize that he wasn't being particularly sensitive about the way he described Eb Cresap's demise. Some perversity made him want to elicit an emotional response from the widow. She was much too cool and detached.

"Ma'am," he said after a pause, "it would help us a lot if we could have the names of all the tenants who've moved out of Mr. Cresap's apartment buildings during the past twelve months. Your husband was a businessman, and, as you've already suggested, he had some unhappy customers."

"Eb knew how to cheat all right." Lydia Cresap looked up for the first time, and Warren Pease was startled to see that her large, intense eyes were a heady green. She was smiling at him. Perhaps laughing at him?

"Why don't you take the records with you." She went to a desk in the corner of the living room and removed several folders from the bottom drawer.

"Eb was a methodical man, so

everything here should be complete. He even wrote down his rationalizations for withholding deposits and refusing to repair leaking faucets." She spoke of him as though he were a casual acquaintance she had recently and none-too-happily passed on the street.

"Uh, one more thing." The woman began studying the floor again. "His watch is missing. It was extremely expensive, and Ebner never took it off except to bathe. But when Officer Larson brought me the list of personal effects, the watch wasn't on it.

"His wallet," she added, "apparently wasn't touched. But, then, there was less than ten dollars in it, and he didn't carry credit cards."

After promising to look for the watch and thanking Lydia Cresap for her time, Warren returned to his office with the handful of folders. His assistant, Boo Larson, looked up in surprise.

"Who bludgeoned you?" he inquired mildly.

The police chief suddenly realized that he had been frowning ferociously. "I wish you wouldn't mention bludgeoning, Boo. It hits too close to home these days. I guess I'm frustrated. There just aren't any strong leads in the Cresap case.

"Ebner died around six p.m., and everyone directly involved has an alibi. His wife was in York, visiting a niece, and both of the

hired hands were already home and having supper with their families. If I arrested everybody who disliked the man, the whole town would have to be jailed," he said thoughtfully.

"But murder is an act that's usually performed by someone feeling more than dislike. Ordinarily, to kill, one must feel some measure of hatred."

"Or desperation," Boo observed.

"Or desperation," conceded his superior. "Look, let's try a long shot. It's all we've got." Warren tossed the folders onto his assistant's desk. "Go through these records, Boo, and pull the names and addresses of tenants who might have had some quarrel with Eb or who moved out during the past twelve months and lost part of their rent deposit. Then narrow the list down to former tenants who still live in this area. Mrs. Cresap says her husband kept very complete records."

Boo Larson nodded assent and, typically, began working at once on the assignment. Warren noted with satisfaction that, before he had even hung up his jacket, the other man had read through five papers.

By noon the next day, Boo had carefully separated the wheat from the chaff. Virtually everyone who had lived in the Cresap apartments had had a quarrel with the landlord, but there were only four ex-tenants who still lived in

One was a student, Nicki Sweetser, who had an apartment in nearby Portland. A couple, Ron and Ella Marie Dosker, was living on the south side of Hamrock, and another former tenant, Miriam Walsh, had also remained in town. The police chief recognized the Walsh woman's new address as being a retirement residence.

In each case, Eb Cresap indicated on his records that some or all of the rent deposit was not returned. The note on the Sweetser file read, *Entire deposit withheld, furniture damage*, followed by the initials S.C.C. and a zero. On the Dosker file was written, *Minus \$75 for carpet cleaning*, and on Miriam Walsh's, *Less \$66 for removal of 88 nails at 75 cents per nail*.

"It's not much to go on," Warren ruefully admitted, "but at least it's a start. If nothing turns up here, we'll have to check out the rest of the tenants, on the chance that someone from out-of-state was in the vicinity when Cresap died."

The following morning, the police chief and his assistant visited the Doskers, who were living in a small duplex on the outskirts of Hamrock. It was Mrs. Dosker who answered the doorbell, and she immediately began insisting that Warren and Boo had come to see the wrong people.

Her husband intervened. He was a tall, thin man, probably in his late fifties, with light blue eyes that seemed to have difficulty adjusting to the morning sun.

"Invite them in, Ella Marie. They won't bite us."

Warren observed that the latter remark, apparently intended to be facetious, was made without much conviction. He tried to assuage the couple's anxiety with a reassuring smile.

"We won't take up much of your time, folks. This is just a routine call. You were tenants once, I believe, in Eb Cresap's apartment house on Blue Johnson Road?"

"Yes. Yes, we were. We heard about the . . . murder." Ron Dosker answered the initial questions while his wife made busy sounds in the next room, preparing coffee for the visitors.

"Mr. Dosker, did you have any problems with Mr. Cresap about your rent deposit?" It was Boo Larson who spoke.

The man began to relax perceptibly. In fact, Warren thought, he was almost smiling. When his wife returned to the room, he acknowledged her presence with a playful toss of his head.

"Did we ever! We cleaned that apartment until our hands were peeling and burned by the disinfectant, and still he kept half the deposit."

"Did you try to get it back?"

Ron Dosker looked sheepish.

"I wanted to, but Ella Marie said to leave well enough alone."

"We couldn't prove that we hadn't left a dirty carpet behind," she interjected, handing Warren a large blue coffee mug and a paper napkin. "We didn't want any trouble."

"We've found out since," her husband said, "that Cresap got away with a lot of things like that. Things that were really dishonest."

"Have you seen him since you moved out?" The police chief took a sip of the hot, black coffee, surreptitiously studying first Ron Dosker and then his wife.

There was a long pause, and Warren could feel some of the earlier tension returning.

"I ran into him once in town," the tall man acknowledged finally. "It wasn't very pleasant."

"Ronnie, don't exaggerate." The woman spoke sharply.

"It *wasn't* very pleasant," he firmly repeated. "I asked about the deposit, and he . . . laughed. He said, 'What do you plan to do about it?' And then he laughed again."

Ella Marie Dosker was sitting on the couch beside her husband, wringing her hands. "There was nothing to it," she told the two policemen, her eyes pleading. "Ron isn't a violent man. He was just angry about the cheating and the ridicule."

Warren nodded encouragingly, and Boo purred, "That sort of

thing is hard to take. What happened then?"

"Nothing," said Mrs. Dosker too quickly.

"I hit him." The man spoke carefully. "He was a big fellow, but I hit him. He must've thought he'd been bitten by a mosquito. He didn't fall down or anything. He just . . . looked at me hard and laughed again." Ron Dosker clenched his fist until the knuckles showed white against the gray skin.

"Was that the last time you saw him?" Warren, who was trained to be detached, felt a surge of compassion for the frightened couple.

Husband and wife nodded. "All we know about the murder, Chief Pease, is what we hear on television and read in the newspaper. That's a fact." They both insisted they'd been home together watching the evening news at the time Eb Cresap was murdered.

"Do you know of anyone who might have had a motive for killing him? Anyone who was carrying a grudge?" Boo Larson had his notebook open.

Ron Dosker reached for his coffee mug with shaking hands. "The truth is, not very many people really liked him. He was so driven by money that his human parts were all dried up. You know," — the man looked as though the thought had just occurred to him — "I never once saw Eb Cresap do something

kind just to be doing it."

Warren rose. "We really appreciate your taking the time to talk with us. If you think of anything later that might help the investigation, we'd appreciate your calling us." He turned to the ashen woman, who stood protectively beside her husband. "Thanks for the coffee, Mrs. Dosker."

The two police officers returned to their car and drove away in ponderous silence. Warren headed toward the east side of town, where the only retirement residence in Hamrock was located.

The great brick building was grimy and old and, if possible, more depressing inside than out. The gray interior, with its long, ill-lighted corridors, reminded Warren of a badly planned prison. A faint odor of rot — real or imagined — pervaded the air, and the policeman wrinkled his nose in disgust.

Miriam Walsh's room, number 41, was so small that, as the two men entered, they began to stoop slightly, self-consciously aware that they had entered a Lilliputian world. The woman they had come to see, however, was right for the room — tiny and bent, with skin so wrinkled that it resembled translucent white crepe. Behind thick glasses, her kindly eyes were a faded, watery brown.

The only chair in the room was occupied by another, much larger woman who rose.

Miriam Walsh raised a detaining hand. "Gentlemen," her voice was high and clear, "I'd like for you to meet my friend, Mrs. Matilda Hyatt. Tille; these are the police officers I was telling you about."

Matilda Hyatt nodded, and her several chins wobbled slightly. "Mim's been looking forward to your visit. I was just about to leave." The men backed up against the wall as she passed in front of them. At the door, she paused. "Mim, stop by later. And if you need me, holler."

The smaller woman nodded gratefully, then turned to the two police officers. "If you don't mind," her gesture encompassed the tiny room, "you should probably sit on the bed. There's only one chair, and it isn't very comfortable."

Awkwardly, Warren Pease and Boo Larson sat down on the edge of the bed. It sagged dangerously under their weight.

Warren wasn't sure, from her earlier vague remarks on the telephone, whether Miriam Walsh understood about Eb Cresap's death. "Mrs. Walsh . . ." He stumbled in his uncertainty.

"Miss Walsh." She corrected him firmly.

"Yes — well, Miss Walsh, we need some information about Ebner Cresap."

The tiny woman was sitting as upright as she could on the unpadded chair, her eyes fixed on

Warren's face. "Have you found the murderer?"

The police chief breathed an almost audible sigh of relief. Miriam Walsh was such a frail creature that he had been worrying about the effects of a shock. Her already knowing the facts made his job much easier.

"Not yet, Miss Walsh. Right now we're trying to contact former tenants, particularly those who've moved out of Mr. Cresap's apartments during the past twelve months. We'd like to know more about what sort of man Eb Cresap was and whether he had any enemies."

The little woman was thoughtful for a moment. "Well, he wasn't a good man, not by a long shot. As for enemies, I'd say he had more than his share."

Boo Larson turned his attention away from a five-and-dime religious picture that partially covered some peeling wall paint. "What do you mean by his not being a good man, ma'am?"

"He was a mean and dishonest man, officer. He was so greedy for money that he'd lost all touch with the kinder emotions." Her voice was pitched a little higher now. Warren thought he heard indignation and possibly something more.

"When I moved out, Eb Cresap withheld almost half of my rent deposit. Sixty-six dollars. He said that I'd driven eighty-eight nails into the walls of his apartment."

She looked pleadingly at Boo, as though she thought he might yet be able to see that justice was done.

"I could buy a lot of groceries with sixty-six dollars. Mr. Cresap knew that. I didn't have much money." Abruptly, her voice regained its earlier tranquility and became almost impersonal. "Most of his tenants had problems with him, in one way or another."

"You said that he had a large number of enemies," the policeman persisted. "Can you think of anyone in particular?"

Miriam Walsh smiled. "No — no one in particular. Certainly no one who would murder. It takes such a lot of hatred to kill."

"Or desperation," Boo observed for a second time.

Miss Walsh was silent. She looked tired. In response to the officers' final question, she explained that she had been confined to her bed on the day that her former landlord was killed.

The two men gave her their telephone number and thanked her for seeing them. Both were anxious to leave this cramped room, with its smell of decay and its witness to unrelieved poverty.

Tillie Hyatt was waiting for them in the hallway. "I'm so glad you didn't stay too long," she breathed maternally. "Mim isn't at all well."

"Yes, ma'am." Warren Pease felt mildly reprimanded. Tillie Hyatt reminded him of his third-

grade teacher, Miss Hattie Morrison. Miss Morrison had regularly smacked his knuckles with a ruler.

Once outside, the men conferred briefly and then, with obvious lack of enthusiasm, drove into Portland to see Nicki Sweetser.

After the earlier interviews, Nicki was a welcomed change. Probably not yet twenty, wearing jeans and tennis shoes, her long blonde hair hanging loose over her shoulders, she radiated life and joy.

"You're looking for the murderer, I know," the young woman said, waving them into two dilapidated chairs. "But I can't be of much help, I'm, afraid. I took Eb to court for holding out on my rent deposit, but I certainly wasn't interested in hurting the man. It was pleasure enough to see the expression on his face when the judge ordered him to return my money."

The S.C.C. on Eb Cresap's records must have referred to small claims court, Warren thought. "Was there anyone — anyone at all — who might have held a grudge against him? Did you ever hear a tenant say anything unusually . . . vicious?"

"Frankly," Nicki laughed, "we all did. But, no, I can't think of anybody I'd have taken seriously. It's one thing to talk and another to kill." She went on to explain that, at six o'clock on the evening

of the murder, she had been attending a class at the university.

Warren rose to leave, noting as he did that his assistant seemed reluctant to go. Boo handed Nicki Sweetser their card — and when he asked her to call if she thought of anything pertinent to the case, Warren heard urgency in the other man's voice. The police chief suppressed a grin.

"Now what?" Boo settled into the passenger side of the car as Warren took the wheel.

"Now we check out the various alibis and find out whether any of the tenants who moved out-of-state were visiting in Maine this month."

Boo gave a faint, discouraged nod. "Okay. But I'm not feeling optimistic about this case."

The remark seemed prophetic when, five months later, the Cresap murder was placed in an open file, unsolved. By then, virtually everybody had forgotten the incident. Eb Cresap was easily buried. Warren heard via town gossip that his widow was moving to York to live with her niece. The poultry farm had been sold to a man from upstate, and a local couple had bought the apartments.

Warren also learned, through an accidental meeting with the Doskers, that Lydia Cresap had sent them a check for \$75. She was apparently trying to make amends for some of her husband's behavior. The police chief thought

about frail little Miss Walsh and hoped that a refund would reach her, too.

Then, several days later on a Friday evening, Warren received the telephone call that enabled him to close the case. It came from a woman, obviously agitated.

"Chief Pease? This is Tillie Hyatt." While Warren tried unsuccessfully to attach a face to the name, she continued, "Matilda Hyatt. Miriam Walsh's friend."

"Ah, yes. Of course. How is Miss Walsh?" The policeman glanced at the clock and tried to suppress a feeling of annoyance. It was almost suppertime.

"She's dead." Tillie Hyatt spoke bluntly. "She died last week. That's why I'm calling. There's something I want you to have."

Shame replaced annoyance. Poor little woman. Poor, sad little woman. "Shall I come by this evening?"

"Actually, there's no hurry. But, yes. Please. This evening." With that, Tillie Hyatt hung up.

Warren consciously braced himself before entering the senior citizens' residence. If anything, the home was more depressing this evening than it had been on the previous visit. Tillie Hyatt was sitting on a folding chair in the hallway, waiting for him. "Come into my room, Chief Pease. This is . . . terribly confidential."

It occurred to Warren that Matilda Hyatt might be watching too many detective programs. The annoyance briefly returned. He followed the woman into a room that was only slightly larger than the one occupied by Miriam Walsh.

She didn't invite him to sit down. Instead, she went directly to her dresser and withdrew a slip of paper from a small, plastic jewelry box.

"This was in Mim's personal belongings, Chief Pease." He looked at the paper closely — it was a pawn ticket. "All I'm going to say," Tillie's face became distorted, and Warren realized uncomfortably that she was struggling to keep back the tears, "all I'm going to say is that Mim was very, very poor. Dirt poor."

"Just once, she had something more than her social security check. That was when she invited me in to dinner about five months ago. I remember that it made her so happy — to be able to give, you know. Mim had only a hot plate, so she couldn't fix much, but we had vegetable soup and cold cuts and a Port-Salut cheese that she knew I liked."

Warren Pease felt suddenly very cold, and he shuddered slightly as his fingers tightened around the pawn ticket. "Thank you, Mrs. Hyatt. I'll . . . check this out." The woman had begun to weep.

He knew that he had to have

some fresh air, but at the door he paused before bolting. "Do you know, did Mrs. Cresap send Miss Walsh a check to cover the deposit she lost?"

Tillie nodded. "It came the day before Mim died."

The police chief waited until the following morning to contact the pawn shop proprietor. As Tillie Hyatt had said, there was no hurry. Then, uncharacteristically patient, he waited almost ten minutes while the shopkeeper shuffled through his secondhand wares trying to locate the item Miriam Walsh had left with him.

Finally, flushed with success, the man handed the object to Warren. It was a watch, dirty now but obviously expensive. Platinum. A man's watch, but so bejeweled that it looked almost feminine. On the back were the initials E.C.

"You know," the proprietor studied the pawn ticket closely, "this is one transaction I couldn't forget if I wanted to."

Warren looked inquiringly at the other man, his throat too dry for words.

"Would you believe that I offered the old lady seventy-five dollars for this watch? It's good stuff, you know, and I guess I felt sort of sorry for her. You could see she wasn't well. But she turned me down. She said she wanted sixty-six dollars. Not a penny more or a penny less."

The pawnbroker smiled and ran a dustcloth over the top of the scarred wooden counter. "Said it wouldn't be honest to take anything more. So, of course, I gave her what she wanted. No questions asked. Live and let live, I say."

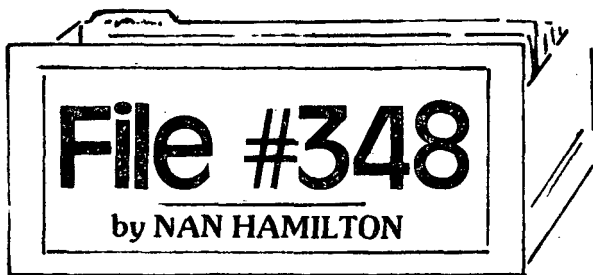
Complete in the Next Issue—

DEADLINE FOR MURDER

The New MIKE SHAYNE Short Novel

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Old Tom Jeffers was a successful latter-day buccaneer — a bootlegger turned builder after Repeal. But when he died, his heirs discovered Old Tom had put most of his profits into gold — and how he had hidden it was for them to find out.



Doctor Mailer knew that one of his students was programmed to kill. The problem was to find out which one — before it happened.

AFTER TWENTY PLODDING academic years, Dr. Edward Mailer was on the verge of success, and it horrified him. He knew now beyond possibility of doubt that one of a group of nineteen normal looking students was going to commit murder. File 348 confirmed it, but the precise psychological hieroglyphics might as well have been hen scratches since they belonged to a number, not a name.

An exhausting day of checking and rechecking his graphs and files had changed nothing. Now he sat before his lonely TV dinner, numb with worry. He had to act. He couldn't just let it happen.

Someone had once said jokingly that Dr. Mailer looked like an unmade bed. It was not just a matter of his clothes which, nowadays, were a hit or miss medley of whatever was clean. The picture somehow included his rather fleshy features and the shiny high-domed forehead from which the greying hair had fled to luxuriate

around his ears. It was an appearance however, that lied outrageously about the precise brilliance of his mind.

In a sense, it had been his wife's death that plunged him into the research study. He had wanted work so demanding that he could forget the solitary homecomings, the loneliness of the double-bed, the silence of the empty house. He had developed the program from his work as consulting psychologist at the State Mental Hospital.

The Mailer studies of patients' behavior patterns and correlated stress factors had proved a valuable medical aid. But his real interest lay in exploring normal behavior patterns in the same relationship. The thrust of his work was to find a way of predicting potential explosions in the human mind before they occurred.

Wheatly College, Dr. Mailer's academic domain, was not averse to prestigious publicity or obtain-

able grants. They agreed that he might use volunteers from his senior seminar class as raw material. But mindful also of potential lawsuits, the trustees insisted that the identities of participating students must be fully protected.

It was this anonymity factor, like a joker in the deck, that had turned success to disaster. He realized bitterly that you cannot take what *will* happen to the police — not without who, where and when, and sometimes, not until the verb *to happen* is past tense.

The mantel clock chimed a reminder that he was late for his Wednesday night student hour. He put the uneaten dinner in the sink, shrugging into his jacket on the way out. He paused only briefly to look at the photograph of a pretty, bright-faced woman, which stood beside the clock.

"Oh, Mary, what shall I do? I can't sick the police onto a bunch of kids without more to go on than this." He often addressed the picture when he was troubled. It seemed to help. "I guess I'd better get to my office. Someone may be waiting."

As he drove his shabby old station wagon the short distance to the college, he reviewed his carefully designed anonymity precautions. They had satisfied the trustees, but they hogtied him now.

Each student involved in the program had been instructed to select a three digit number to be

inscribed on all the special tests Mailer had devised. It also coded the student's daily experience log. The log was a personal chart of a sort, but held no identity clues, since the experiences were recorded merely as success, failure, crisis or static. He knew that to ask for identification would violate the grant terms and force him to abandon three years' work. Moreover, how could he ask for names without giving his reasons? There must be another way.

He was so caught up in his thoughts he almost rammed a car waiting at the light. Was it just a week ago that he had noticed the abrupt change in 348? Why hadn't he caught it sooner? In five subsequent test phases the 348 profile had shown increasing violence tendencies. But the real shock had come this morning, when he had noticed its similarity to the hospital graphs of his homicidal patients. There was no escaping the accusation of the sharp, pointing lines.

The murderer-to-be showed as a controlled individual, with consistent stress factors well handled until two weeks ago. Male or female indications were not conclusive in an increased aggressiveness characteristic of the male. Revolt against authority had become pronounced.

To Edward Mailer it was a clear pattern, but when he pictured himself pointing out to the police that the computer data and graph

curves were predicting murder . . . He shuddered at the idea, and was relieved to find himself turning into the school parking lot.

As he drew up in a vacant space, he saw Vic Tomaso unlocking the door of his Volkswagen two cars down. Vic was one of his seminar students in the program. He genuinely liked the big, outgoing boy. Mailer went over to him.

"Hello, Vic. Missed our chess game last week. You're one up on me, you know."

"Didn't feel like it," Vic said shortly, a frown rigid on his handsome face. His dark eyes surveyed Mailer coldly. Without another word, he got into his car, slammed it into gear and drove off.

Dr. Mailer sighed and turned up the walk to his office. This was so unlike Vic that it hurt. Their growing friendship had been important to him.

Sitting down at his desk, he checked his calendar. The evaluation letters to the mental hospital were due. He could start on these while waiting for the first of his student visitors.

The hospital had forwarded three applications for release. He picked up the one on top — Gary Evans. The tests indicated that the boy was going to succeed in his fight against his suicidal bouts of depression. Dr. Mailer put a cassette into his recorder and taped his findings, recommending him for release.

The second case was Wilson Collins, and sadly routine. The black ex-prizefighter, whose poor addled brain constantly misled him into belligerent attacks, would be a turndown. Mailer sighed and recorded his conclusions.

The last application was that of Melitia Carson, a quiet self-contained little woman, who had been committed for a homicidal attack on her ex-husband. Given time, she might make it, but pre-release testing had shown hew and increasing violence trends. The doctor spoke into the recorder, confirming the verdict, and tossed the cassette into his secretary's box for transcribing.

He wondered if Ann Grey would stop by tonight as she sometimes did. Ann was also one of his seminar program students, who worked part time as a secretary to himself and Don Weston, the other psychology professor. She was a sweet girl and he liked her.

Alone in the world as far as he knew, she had put herself through college with the help of a small annuity and her part time work. Mailer had been using Ann a lot on the routine procedures of the program and since he needed an assistant, he had recently offered her the position full time, after graduation.

He brightened at the thought she might come by to pick up the cassettes. He felt refreshed every time he saw her . . . lithe, slim, with the shining beauty of youth.

When he was with her, he felt younger, somehow, and to his amazement she seemed to enjoy his company.

A motor bike revving up in the parking lot snapped him back from his spindrift of dreaming. He knew he must come to grips with the 348 problem. But first he wanted to make a note of some new therapy for Melitia Carson. He reached into his vest pocket and took out a thick worn memo book his wife had given him. He filled a page with his angular writing and slipped it back into his jacket.

His watch showed 7:40. Perhaps no one would come in tonight. He went to the filing cabinet and took out the 348 file. His finger traced the lines of violent homicidal peaking that began about a week ago. What had happened to cause it? That was the clue he needed. His mind played with the possibility of using a group psychodrama, until a knock broke his attention and he looked up to see Travis Martin at the open door of his office.

"Can I see you a minute, sir?"

Dr. Mailer smiled a welcome. Travis was one of the few students who called him "sir." He had been in the program since fall.

"Of course. Come in." Automatically the doctor studied the nervous jerky movements of the boy's too-thin body and made small talk to fill the sudden silence as Travis seemed unable to speak. Mailer waited, his mind

busy assembling pertinent background data . . . resident student from Detroit, working parents, scholarship, an A student.

"Sir," Travis found his voice at last, "how do I get my father committed to a mental hospital?"

"Well, that depends on the situation."

"The damn son of a bitch nearly killed my mother. She's in the hospital. A friend called me." A sob took his voice away and he pushed a fist against his mouth to get control.

"Oh, Travis, I'm sorry! Maybe it's not as bad as —"

"It's bad. Mom wrote me just last week that she was leaving him because she couldn't take the beatings anymore. She moved into a hotel until I could send her the air fare to come out here. I've been worried sick. Then, last night, he got her."

Dr. Mailer got up and went around to where Travis sat. He put his arm around the hunched up shoulders. "I'm sure your mother will have police protection in the hospital. And by now your father may have realized what he's done and regret it. Why don't you go home this weekend and get it straightened out? You'll probably find things aren't as bad as you think."

"How do I get him committed? That's all I want to know."

"Your father will have to be examined by a court psychiatrist, who will make the determination.

Has he ever done this before?"

"He's done it and done it and done it . . . whenever things went wrong or just for kicks. I remember lying in bed when I was a kid and hearing him throw her around. I'd see her face in the morning and I wanted to kill him, but I wasn't big enough." Deep, hard sobs shook him again briefly. "I've wanted to kill him all my life, I think. Why didn't I?"

Mailer took his time answering because his mind was sending off alarm signals. Is Travis 348? It fits. The trigger incident - happened a week ago.

"Because you're not the beast your father is. You're not a killer, Travis." He dropped the words slowly into the silence as he tried to hold the boy's eyes with his own.

Travis looked away, his jaw hardening as he fought for control. Mailer knew he would take no pat answer to the ugly question. Finally Travis spoke, almost to himself. "I guess I was just too chicken-shit scared."

Then he looked up, abruptly calm. "You're right, sir. I'm going home tomorrow. I know what I have to do." The boy's lips smiled briefly, but his eyes were cold, his thin features hatchet hard. "If she dies, I'll kill him."

"Come on now, Travis. Cut it out. You don't mean that . . . your own father! Listen, I'll call a friend of mine in Detroit, a psychiatrist. You can talk to him and —"

"Thank you, but don't bother, sir. I don't need a psychiatrist. I'm through talking and copping out." Travis was up and on his way to the door, his manner calm and purposeful. He turned back. "I'll see that he never touches her again."

The boy stood a moment in the doorway, looking as awkward and guileless as he always had. "You hit it right on when you said he was a beast. He's just a dumb bastard beast. It's not the same as killing a man at all." He smiled crookedly, sprinted down the short hall and was gone.

Dr. Mailer felt chilled with failure as he sat down again at his desk. *Is he 348?* He reached for the phone, then paused. *It could be verbal heroics. Travis is a thinker, not a doer. But if he is 348 . . .*

A girl's light voice stopped him. "Hi, thought you might like some coffee." The interruption, the reprieve, was Ann Grey coming towards him, smiling and holding out a paper cup. "Light, three sugars, just as you like it."

"I never wanted a cup of coffee more." He kept his tone matter-of-fact, but his heart turned over as he looked at her. He wished he could reach out and take her into his arms, let the sweetness of her wash his mind clean of its ugly torment. But he sat carefully on his side of the desk, allowing himself only the soft touch of her fingers against his as he took

the cup from her hand.

"I haven't seen you to talk to since we went to Los Angeles for the UCLA seminar last week."

"I know," she said quietly. Absently, she gathered the hospital file folders together. "I'll put these in the cabinet while I'm here. That, too?" She reached for the 348 file.

"No, I'm working on that." He watched her as she went over to the cabinet. She closed the file drawer and came back to the desk, her hands clasped tensely in front of her.

"I really meant to come in before now and thank you for the trip to Los Angeles." Her pale grey eyes scanned his face and looked away. "It was just that something came up and I didn't want to see anybody."

"Vic — again?" It had been settled for more than two years that she was Vic Tomaso's girl. Amiable enough about most things, Vic was strangely possessive about Ann. There had been more than one scene on campus which had embarrassed her terribly.

"Oh, yes. Vic — and other things."

"Want to talk about it?"

"No . . . yes . . . maybe later." Footsteps sounded in the hallway. She straightened and then, with an apologetic smile, reached over and put her hand on his, as it lay on the desk. "Thank you anyway. You've been very kind."

"It was a pleasure, Ann. I . . ."

"I thought I'd find you here with him." The words slapped at them. Ann snatched her hand away and turned to see Vic Tomaso blocking the office doorway, his face ugly with anger. "We had a date, tonight, Ann. Remember?"

"I'm sorry, Vic. I just stopped by for a minute to pick up some tapes to transcribe."

"Is that why you were holding his hand?" Vic's sneer was eloquent.

Dr. Mailer rose, angry himself now. "Get hold of yourself. You're behaving like a child. It's exactly as Ann said."

"A child, huh?" Vic moved closer, his big fists clenched.

It was Ann who took hold of the situation. Her eyes were cold and her voice a whip.

"What makes you think you own me, Vic? No one tells me what to do — *no one!*" Mailer could see a tremor of rage shaking her. "I work for Dr. Mailer, and he's my friend. Don't you try to make something dirty out of it."

Vic shifted uneasily as she stared him down. After a moment Ann turned and took the cassettes out of the work box. "They'll be ready in the morning, Dr. Mailer." As she moved toward the door Vic caught at her arm.

"Get out of my way," she said. "I don't want to see you or hear from you again." She said it with such icy determination that Vic

let go, and both men stood silent, watching her leave the room, her deceptive fragility wrapping her like a garment.

Mailer, conscious of the boy's hurt and humiliation spoke quietly. "I'm sorry this happened, Vic. You misunderstood and came on too strong with Ann. She's just reacting out of shock. Give her time to cool down. She didn't mean what she said."

"She meant it." Vic's voice was dull, defeated. Then abruptly, he turned and looked at the doctor. "I used to think you were one of the greatest men I'd ever known. What a laugh! I've fought off every creep in the school who tried to muscle in on Ann and me, but I never thought you'd be the one to break us up."

"Nonsense, Vic! I'm old enough to be her father."

"Damn right you are! You should have remembered that. For two years we've planned on getting married after graduation. Then she started working for you and everything began coming apart. Last week you took her to L.A. and offered her a job on the project. She wants it and won't go back East with me."

"I had no idea the job offer could cause trouble. Do you want me to withdraw it?"

"It's too late. She broke our engagement. Tonight, I finally got her to promise to meet me and talk things over." Vic's voice broke. "I know her . . . she meant

what she said. She's through with me." His head drooped and he looked helplessly at his big clumsy hands.

Mailer felt sick and sensed that whatever he said at this point, Vic would resent. Still he had to try. "Look, it's not as bad as you think . . ."

"Don't start with your phony explanations." Vic moved closer to him, the angry force of his powerful body real and threatening. "I know when I've been had. You're a dirty old man and you've taken away the only girl I've ever really wanted. Nobody does that to Vic Tomaso. You can tell her that when you see her. I settle my scores."

Forestalling any possible reply, he turned and left, his pent up anger sounding in the hammer of his heels down the hallway, in the bang of the outside door. Mailer slumped despondently at his desk. The ugliness of the scene haunted him. He stared down at the papers before him, unseeing at first, until the black numerals of the file caught and held him . . . 348 . . .

It could be Travis, lusting to avenge his mother. *Had* to be! He must make that call. But 348 was now shouting a new name that followed the pattern as well as Travis. Only one thing did not fit. Vic's jealous flare-ups and occasional brawls did not reflect 348's control. And yet — who was to say what was or was not, exceptional

control for Vic Tomaso?

Thinking about it, Mailer realized that he had almost lost sight of the ultimate importance . . . the victim. Then it hit him. "It could be me," he said aloud, putting the incomprehensible idea into words. He sat for a long moment, facing the possibility. At last he rubbed his tired eyes with the heel of his hand and pulled himself together, willing himself to think. No, Vic was just a hot-headed kid. He'd cool down.

Dr. Mailer looked at his watch. It was too late to call Detroit now. He would do it in the morning. He must try to reach Travis' father and at least warn him of the boy's disturbed state of mind. Failing that he would try to have the hospital intercept Travis when he arrived.

There seemed to be nothing more he could do tonight. He turned off the lights, locked his office and plodded down the hall to the entrance of the building. He stood for a minute in the doorway taking in the cool night air in deep, satisfying breaths. He saw his car, lonely looking in the almost deserted parking lot.

He was strangely reluctant to begin the short walk toward it, but he did, step by step, his unprotected back cringing in on itself, his ears straining for a betraying sound.

Then, at last he was in the car, a small haven of safety. As he turned the ignition on, he faced

the fact that an inner primitive consciousness as yet undisciplined by the power of his mind, had accepted the fact that he was a potential victim.

On the way home, Mailer thought about Vic Tomaso. How would he attack? A knife . . . a gun? No, it would be with his hands, those big, powerful hands. That was the only satisfying way for a temperament such as Vic's. He passed the student union, catching a glimpse of the lounge still lighted.

It made him feel lonely. How had he drifted into this position, a pawn in a game others were playing? He wondered if all victims would ask that question if they knew in advance they were targeted to die.

A horn tooted and a car full of laughing kids swerved past him. It pulled him together in startled alarm. Then he smiled at the happy normality of it. He was almost home. A feeling of relief welled up in him as he parked the car and safely negotiated the short walk to the house and let himself inside.

He went directly to the mantel and picked up Mary's picture. "I'm home, dear, it will be all right now," he said and gently put it back. Then he went into the kitchen for some hot coffee and a snack. The warmth of the house closed around him in comfort. Taking his fresh brewed coffee and a sandwich into the living

room he settled into his favorite worn leather chair. He was still wide awake so he picked up one of the many professional journals he tried to keep abreast of, and settled down to read.

The doorbell shrilled, cutting into his concentration so abruptly that he jerked and dropped the magazine. He held his breath as he listened, willing it not to ring again. But it did, insistent, demanding. Slowly he picked up the magazine and put it on the table, postponing the moment when he would have to go to the door and open it. Again the bell clamored at him. He stood at the door, his hand on the knob.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"It's me — Ann. I've got to see you." Her voice was tight, strung out. Relief flooded him and he hurriedly opened the door. She stood there, her slenderness bundled into a shapeless, bulky sweater.

"You look ill, Ann. Has something happened? Come in . . . come in!"

She glanced sharply over her shoulder and walked past him into the house.

"Sit down, Ann. I'll be with you in a minute." He closed the door and bolted it, giving himself time to think. He turned back to her, attempting a reassuring smile. But Ann was not sitting waiting for his comfort. She was standing in the center of the room, a small gun steady in her hand. It was pointed

directly at his chest.

For a second of silence, breath stilled in his body as his mind registered the reality before him. She waited, expressionless, her eyes on his, the deadly impact of her purpose revealed in the hatred on her soft, young features.

"Ann," he stammered; "what is it? I don't understand."

She said nothing, reached into the pocket of the shaggy sweater, never taking her eyes off him, and mutely held out one of the cassette tapes she had taken from him earlier for copying.

"One of my tapes! What . . . ?" He moved to take it but the gun jerked motioning him back. A pulse pounding in his temple, he accepted the horror of it. *My God, she's 348 . . . Ann . . . 348.*

Her voice, strident and insistent, beat at him. "I couldn't believe it until I heard the tape. It was you that condemned her. My friend, Dr. Mailer, told them to keep her shut up."

"Ann, take it easy. I don't understand . . ."

"Shut up!" she said viciously. "Don't talk. You can't deny it. It's all here on the tape."

"But the tape is about . . ."

"The tape is about my mother. About Melitia Grey Carson — my mother, the most beautiful, kindest, gentlest person in the world."

"Your mother?" His throat was dry. He licked his lips, forcing the words out. "Why didn't you tell me, Ann?"

"When they shut her up, I swore I'd get her out. So I didn't tell anyone she was my mother. I never went to see her. Her daughter, Ann Carson, is a name on a record only. They'd never look for her living with Ann Grey far away from here." A smile of satisfied cunning curved her lips. "When I got the job with you, I saw how I could do it."

"But Ann, she's still sick. She could attack you, even now."

"Sick? That was four years ago. She's been getting better. I've read your reports. That's why I waited. I believed in you. I trusted you, and waited. But you betrayed us!" She was trembling but the gun held steady.

"I have been helping her, Ann." Mailer fought to control his voice. "She was going well, even when we took her off medication. Then, last week, she grew worse. It sometimes happens that way. She tried to kill another patient!"

Ann shook her head stubbornly. "It was a mistake . . . or you're lying. My mother wouldn't harm anyone. She'd just punish them if they deserved it."

"Listen to me, Ann. She tried to kill your father."

"He wasn't my father." Her voice had turned sullen. "He tricked my mother into marrying him when my real father died. Then he lied to her and deceived her. She had every right to punish him. She'd never harm anyone

else." The expression on Ann's face told Mailer she was convinced of what she was saying.

"You can't know that for sure, Ann. You must believe me. In the state she's in, anything could tip her over the edge again — fear, anger, opposition. I had no choice."

"I don't believe it. You had a choice, and so do I. I wonder if you realize what it is?" She was smiling again, a cold, set little smile. His mind raced, refusing to accept the reality of the moment. He knew that she meant to kill him. In minutes, seconds, he would die. He had found 348.

Her cold precise voice was telling how it was going to be.

"Your letter will be in tonight's mail, Dr. Mailer, recommending that Melitia Carson be given a weekend pass in custody of her daughter, Ann Carson, for home therapy. I'll write it and sign it for you. I have done that dozens of times. It won't be questioned." Her smile was triumphant now.

"It wouldn't work."

"It'll work long enough for me to get away." The smile grew into a laugh, deep in her throat. "And you won't be around to cancel it. I've planned very carefully."

A desperate calm seemed to come over him. He kept his eyes on hers, speaking against time while his hand stole casually to his pocket, reaching for his pipe, for anything he might throw. "If

you kill me, Ann, they'll catch you. No one will help your mother then."

She was almost gay now. "They won't catch me. That's the best part. They'll catch Vic. This is his gun. He gave it to me to protect myself. I've only to shoot you and then I'll call Vic and beg him to come and help me. He thinks you want to rape me anyway. He'll believe me. After that, I'll call the police and report a gunshot from your house.

"When they get here, they won't find me, only dear old Vic." She looked like a child well pleased at her recited lesson.

Then she stepped closer. Mailer recognized the moment. Protest convulsed his mind. In an explosion of sound, a thrusting, burning pain pierced and crumpled him twisting to the floor. A frayed edge of carpet caught his eye, a faded curlicue of pattern. Then, nothing . . .

Pain beating like a pulse pulled him back to consciousness where sensation was the sole knowledge of being. There was a smell, strangely acrid, silence broken only by the rasp of his own breathing. He lay still, feeling the scratch of carpet under his cheek while his mind fumbled for explanations.

With another pulse of pain they came floating in — *Ann . . . the gun . . . 348 . . . Was she still here?* He stifled a reaching breath,

forcing stillness on his body, and listened. Silence.

He welcomed another wave of pain that told him he was alive and risked opening his eyes. In the perimeter he could see, nothing moved. Summoning his strength, he turned himself over. He was alone.

Slowly he sat up, aware now of the wetness running down his arm, the burning ache in his shoulder. He put his hand up, felt the ragged hole on the front of his jacket, and drew out the bulky little notebook he kept in the vest pocket.

An ugly gash had ripped across the cover. It must have deflected the bullet to his shoulder. Despite the pounding pain, he rubbed his fingers gratefully across the mutilated book, remembering the day Mary had given it to him.

Painfully, he pulled himself to his feet, driven by a sense of urgency. There was something he must do . . . the police . . . warn the hospital. But first, he needed a drink to steady himself and a towel to stop the bleeding. A wave of dizziness forced him to sit down for a moment.

Suddenly sounds burst on him — the slam of a car door, the pound of feet on the walk. The front door banged back on its hinges and Vic Tomaso was striding toward him shouting.

"Where's Ann? What have you done to her?"

Weakly, Mailer leaned his head

on his hand. "She's gone, Vic."

"No wonder she's gone; you tried to rape her. She was hysterical when she called me."

"My God, no, Vic. She lied to you. It was something else . . . she shot me."

"Too bad she didn't kill you."

Mailer felt his mind slipping. "Vic, listen, she's 348. It was bound to happen."

It was becoming an effort to speak but Mailer knew he must make Vic understand. The realization of his discovery brought a wave of new horror. "Ann, little Ann . . . she's 348!"

"You're not making sense, Mailer. What are you talking about? 348? What's 348?"

It was hard to be coherent, but he had to try. "The seminar program . . . for the past week, File subject 348 has been indicating a homicidal outburst. I've been trying to track it down. I never dreamed it was Ann. Please, call a doctor." He closed his eyes, exhausted.

Vic did not move. "There's no way that Ann could be 348."

"I didn't want to believe it either. But you have to accept it, she is. She just shot me."

"No, Mailer, you're wrong. It's not Ann. You see, I know who it is. That's *my* number. *I'm* 348!"

Deliberately, he began to move closer to the helpless man. His foot struck something. Quickly Vic bent down and picked it up. An amused smile flickered and

was gone. "Ann's gun. I gave it to her." It looked like a toy in his big fist — a ridiculous and deadly toy.

"So 348 is programmed for murder. Is that it, Doctor?" The black hole of the gun waited for an answer.

With an effort Mailer forced his eyes up from the gun to stare unflinching at 348, potential killer — a boy named Vic Tomaso.

"Programmed, but not committed, Vic. There's a difference."

Life and death seconds passed like heartbeats in the silent room. "The police are on the way, you know. Ann called them."

"She called me!"

"Only after she thought I was dead, Vic. Now your prints are on the gun, just as she intended when she dropped it. She set you up."

Mailer realized it was the last move he could make in the game, his final gambit. He waited, suddenly too tired to care, or hope or fear anymore. He watched the conflict play across Vic's face until he knew that the verdict was in. The cold round hole of the gun pressed against his temple.

Then, moments before the police siren tipped the delicate balance, 348 made his final decision. The relentless pressure at his temple dropped away.

Silently, Mailer took the small gun from Vic's unresisting hand and laid it on the table. Together, they waited for the police. ●

Within the Family

by JACK LEAVITT

Reuben's TV interview with best-selling novelist Tyler Paige looked like a routine assignment. But it opened up a can of exceedingly dangerous worms that threatened to cause another San Francisco earthquake.

KRKN-TV OPERATED on a low budget. To keep down programming costs, the newly-licensed UHF station routinely taped its interview shows outdoors, on an asphalt promenade that lay between the rear entrance of its office building and a blue-green estuary fed by San Francisco Bay.

For Tuesday's *Booked for Pleasure* taping, featuring Reuben Conrad as the host, the spring weather proved ideal — mild temperatures, diffused morning sunlight, and only the faintest trace of a breeze. In tan sport jacket,

green slacks and string tie, Reuben found the setting picnic-like, almost justifying Channel 22's parsimony.

Time moved deceptively fast as Reuben chatted with Tyler Paige, author of *Dragonmind*. Nature being so gracious, the visiting writer — dressed in a custom-tailored heavy blue suit — forced himself to submit without complaint to the *al fresco* confrontation. Throughout the program, though, Paige kept stroking the interview bench, looking for splinters.

"Two minutes," the lone cameraman signaled with two fingers upraised against the sky.

Outwardly ignoring the signal, but carefully reckoning his time, Reuben glided into his final question. "With all the cities you've visited to discuss *Dragonmind*, did you run into any unique, unexpected moments on your return to San Francisco, where you were born?"

For the dark-haired, smiling interviewer, the question held no sting. All he sought was a local tie-in to a national book promotion tour.

"Why should there be surprises?" Paige scowled. Broad-shouldered, mustached and as dark-haired as his interrogator, the fiftyish author seemed offended. "Have you been arranging problems for me?"

Taken aback, Reuben shook his head. "A homecoming after so many years . . ." he began. Sympathetic eyes in a softly-rounded face indicated that his puzzlement was sincere.

"Listen here," Paige insisted, apparently torn between keeping a secret to work out alone and sharing it with strangers who might have otherwise unattainable answers.

Reuben listened, pleased to allow a few seconds of silence on a television show.

"There was a surprise. A shock about my birth and who my, ah, relatives are. Anyone who knew

my parents — Benjamin Paige and Joyce Wingwood Paige — please get in touch with me. You see . . ."

"Wrap it up," signaled the cameraman's clenched fist.

"To our viewers, then," Reuben spoke directly to the emptiness that would soon be a living room audience, "a challenge we don't yet understand. If you have information about Tyler Paige's family or birth, write or telephone me here at KRKN-TV. Thank you."

With what he hoped was an acceptable smile, Reuben faced the camera until the cameraman saluted, "That's it."

"I'm sorry we ran out of time," Reuben helped Paige untangle his clip-on microphone. "But we could have results before you leave town. You've met our assistant general manager, Sherry Stanton. A lovely woman. She can rearrange schedules so this tape'll run tomorrow — Wednesday."

"Does anybody watch your show?"

Reuben whispered, "We don't know. The demographic studies can't tell because we've been in business such a short time."

"No one will call."

"Hard to say. Look, we're useful in other ways. I don't have a law school class tonight, so Sherry and I could chauffeur you around if you need help in locating people." Side by side, they walked up the concrete steps towards the KRKN office.

"This is my first visit to San Francisco. Shortly after my birth my parents left for Connecticut."

"And we're strangers whom you can't especially trust."

"I may have to. Simple arithmetic. Without you, I'm alone here. I've never bothered with publishers' representatives."

At Sherry's suggestion, their conclave got under way over coffee at a nearby cafeteria. Dark-haired like her two companions, but with much darker eyes, Sherry was a tall, nicely-curved woman in her late twenties, a few years younger than Reuben. She wore a beige pants suit, a white, frilled blouse, and plain silver earrings. Light lipstick, no nail polish.

"First off, no matter what else we do" — Sherry jotted down exclamation points on her pad — "we've got to confirm that the letter Tyler obtained from the bookstore owner is authentic."

"To me, the bookstore proprietor is an ugly meddler. Edith Marshall, *enemy*. But I do know my mother's handwriting."

"Even in photocopy?" Sherry asked.

"Black ink instead of blue ink. Irrelevant. I've seen her writing all my life."

"Thirty-one years ago," Reuben checked the postmark on a photocopy of the original envelope. "The 'Personal and Confidential' warning certainly didn't keep the letter private. Why in the world would your mother have

written it? Couldn't she keep a secret?"

"Secrets are excruciating. Unless we share them, we toss awake nights, afraid we'll reveal them accidentally. A confidante is someone to blame. How should I know?" Tyler shrugged.

Of one mind, the three searchers pushed aside their cups to make room for the facsimile letter, propped against a napkin stand.

Dear Marcus,

Congratulations on becoming a partner. Haven't I always said you're the best lawyer I ever met? And so willing to help an old friend far from the Golden Gate. At times I'm tempted to burn down Stepney Depot and fly home. Is there room in San Francisco for another old widow who loves to reminisce?

Tyler plans to keep on writing, which means, I guess, that I'll be supplying his allowance for a long time. I never do seem to get enough money for us. Of course you were right about his adoption or, as you lawyers say, 'lack of same.' No sense bemoaning it now. When we listed the confinement under the name Joyce Paige, as you so nicely arranged to avoid scandal, Tyler's birth certificate was in proper form from the moment the obstetrician slapped his little bottom.

Too bad I wasn't there.

But, oh, it was frightening for Ben and me to begin formal adoption proceedings later, no matter what all of us had planned. People would pry too much into our lives. Why let a judge insult us if he didn't like our looks? No, thank you. To the Bureau of Vital Statistics I was Tyler's mother. That should have been enough, no matter how fussy you lawyers are.

With Ben gone, Tyler and I are alone. Since he's a Paige by connivance, I don't want him ringing his real parents' doorbell one evening and saying, 'Hello, I'm your grown son. Now that you're married, take me back.' I promised to keep him, and I will. A bargain's a bargain.

Such an odd congratulations note. Your letters have become so haphazard that I always do slip into the past. But congratulations, again. Nothing would please me more than learning you're well and prosperous. As ever,

Joyce

Their reading finished, they stared anew at the greyish photocopy, now lying flat on the table. The reproduced handwriting yielded no more information.

"I'd never be as trusting as your mother, Tyler."

"Well, Reuben, dear, I would," Sherry said. "How nice it is to put

faith in a person's integrity! Otherwise, we lock ourselves in boxes and live alone."

"I'd rather be blackmailed by someone I didn't know. Who's Marcus Boland?"

"When my parents lived in San Francisco, he was their best friend. Even though I never met him, he always remembered my birthday. A kind man, dead for several years."

"Careless with correspondence."

"You know," Sherry brooded, "the firm is still listed in the Yellow Pages as 'Boland and Boland'..."

Reuben's "Mmmm" meant that he had to swallow the last of his coffee before speaking up. Tyler was impatient, Sherry amused.

"Means nothing," Reuben explained. "That's a traditional lawyer's practice. Keeps the name of deceased senior partners until all their clients have also passed beyond the reach of retainer fees."

"What I meant" — Sherry rubbed her own chin to signal Reuben that he had flecks of coffee to wipe away — "is that if he died recently, the firm should have records available for Tyler."

"Unless the bookstore lady stole them all," said the author.

Once again defending absent strangers, Sherry said, "Miss Marshall means well. I can understand why she wants to keep the original letter."

"Money? Blackmail?"

"No," Sherry protested. "A sense of literary intrigue. You're a famous writer, Tyler, and she's got an authentic wedge into your past. She could be sponsoring a dozen Ph.D. candidates from Berkeley."

Tyler shuffled silverware to subdue his anger. "All I know is that yesterday she sent this photocopy to my hotel, with a note on the back of her business card that she found the original in a used copy of *A Slight Hunger*, my first success, and thought I'd be interested in reading it. She was sorry, *I'll bet*, that the original might be seen by unsympathetic eyes. I haven't been able to reach her since."

"Progress." Sherry's pen darted across her pad. "We've now got two pending interviews. When we're back at the office I'll telephone for appointments. Shall we offer dinner to the law firm or the bookstore lady?"

"Toss a coin. Either one might be the enemy."

Heads or tails, however, both prospects rejected dinner. Walter Boland, the attorney, hesitated on the telephone long enough for Sherry to suspect him of reading through the day's mail before agreeing to see them at 5:00 p.m. Edith Marshall, the bookstore owner, apologized so extensively for not being able to welcome them earlier that Sherry almost forgot to set an 8:00 p.m. meeting

at the Owl store.

Boland and Boland's 17th floor office suite was quietly intimidating. Through a heavily-paneled hall door, with the firm name in small gilt letters, Tyler, Sherry and Reuben entered a windowless waiting room, where the absence of magazines suggested that no one had long to wait. They walked across thick, green carpeting, under mellow incandescent lighting, to a sliding glass panel, behind which sat a thoughtful looking receptionist.

"Mr. Paige?" she asked. At the author's admission she spoke confidentially into a telephone intercom. Moments later, a door opened to their left and the receptionist announced, "Mr. Boland's secretary will escort you to his office." Briskly and silently the secretary did so.

"Mr. Paige?" Walter Boland repeated the receptionist's question. At the author's renewed, "Yes," the attorney — whose brown suit matched his tennis court tan — rose for a handshake across his desk. Though in his forties and bound to an indoor profession, the sandy-haired attorney exuded athletic good health, combined with personal coolness. "And . . . ?"

"Miss Stanton and Mr. Conrad," Tyler said. He offered no further explanation. *Your move* was the unspoken challenge.

As though he sought exactly that response, Boland gestured to

his visitors to draw up chairs facing the desk while he sat down behind it. The glass top was bare, except for an inscribed photograph of the governor — "*To Walter, With thanks, Jim*" — but low cabinets within arm's reach gave Boland quick access to his files.

On the wall immediately behind him hung his single visible credential — a certificate proclaiming that Walter Streck Boland was admitted to practice before the United States Supreme Court.

Side by side in straight-backed cushioned chairs, Reuben and Sherry brushed fingers for reassurance, conscious that they were here on the sufferance of two domineering strangers. Tyler placed himself at a corner of the desk, angled so that he looked directly out a high window rather than straight at the attorney. Boland might soon have to be induced to do a favor but until then dominance was the prize.

"Years ago, Mr. Boland, our parents were friends." Tyler spoke urbanely. "I assume they would have encouraged their children to go and do likewise. For that reason I'm intruding on you. Have I come at a convenient time?"

"I rarely leave the office before six."

"Good. The issue is my mother and father. Who are they?"

Boland stroked his chin. "The commonplace philosophical question is, 'Who am I?' But from Miss

Stanton's telephone call, I gather some mysterious letter from your mother worries you. You're anxious to determine whether my firm has records on your unknown natural parents."

"That's correct." Tyler, his features anxious, leaned towards Boland.

"We don't. Sorry."

"Nothing at all?"

"Nothing about your natural parents."

"Excuse me, sir," Reuben interrupted. "Isn't that negative pregnant?"

"Are you an attorney, sir?" Boland demanded. He seemed warier than ever.

"Not yet. I'm finishing law school. And they still teach us to watch out for an answer which seems to deny something while actually admitting it's almost true. 'Nothing about your *natural* parents' should mean *something* about your unnatural parents. To wit, Mr. and Mrs. Paige."

"You're astute. We do indeed have a file on Benjamin and Joyce Paige."

"So many years . . ." Sherry mused.

Boland slid open a file cabinet and removed a long tan folder. "Boland and Boland specializes in probate matters, Miss Stanton. Our practice is rooted in the past. We can reach any record, no matter how old, in an hour or less."

"May I, Mr. Boland, please see

that file?" Paige inquired.

Shaking his head, Boland kept the folder. Nothing in his manner suggested that he was enjoying himself, but his visitors knew that his neutral pose would fade the moment they were gone.

"Sorry, Mr. Paige. A client's dealings with his attorney are confidential. If there's something you'd like to know that I'm ethically free to reveal, I'll do so."

As he forced himself to wait, sunlight glinted in Tyler's eyes. "Why trifle with me, Mr. Boland?"

"The time-honored rules of the legal profession. What a client tells us is secret."

"Not quite," Reuben's frown suggested a mind flipping through pages in a textbook. "When you're obliged to reveal the information to serve the client, you have no options. You're a probate firm. Mr. and Mrs. Paige are both dead. If you have their wills, you're duty-bound to produce them. Concealment is a crime." Sherry's *pat-pat* on his knee was Reuben's immediate reward.

Boland placed the folder on his desk, matching its lower edge with the desk's glass edge. From the file he withdrew two 8½x13-inch documents with blue backings.

"Mr. Paige, your friend's suspicions are admirable in a law student but are otherwise rude. Once you acknowledged that my position was awkward, I've always intended to show you your

parents' old wills."

"No notes? Memoranda? Perhaps correspondence?"

For a long moment Boland remained quiet. "No," he said. "If there *had* been correspondence, I probably couldn't have shown it to you. By strict ethical standards I shouldn't even tell you what's *not* in the file. Pass that by. All that the file contains are copies of four wills, the two from San Francisco which my father drew up, and two from Connecticut which superseded those earlier wills. Surely you've seen the Connecticut wills."

"Yes, of course. They were probated on my parents' deaths." The correspondence, Tyler already knew, had escaped to other hands.

"With that background made clear," Boland spoke for the record, "I authorize you to read these wills. They're identical, except that each spouse names the other as sole beneficiary."

Boland handed both San Francisco wills to Tyler. At Reuben's, "May we?" Tyler passed on Benjamin Paige's will for him to share with Sherry. They read quickly, skimming past the formalities which attested to sound minds and described allowances for funeral costs and outstanding debts. Paragraph XIV, however, demanded close attention:

If my aforesaid spouse fails to survive me by sixty (60) days or has been adjudged legally

incompetent within said time, then I hereby nominate and appoint my attorney and friend, Marcus Boland, to serve without bond or limitation as guardian of the person and guardian of the estate of my son Tyler Wingwood Paige, a minor, to so act until said Tyler Wingwood Paige attains his majority or said Marcus Boland requests and obtains an order from the Superior Court relieving him of his guardianship(s).

"Above and beyond, I'd say." Tyler stared questioningly at Boland. "I doubt that you and I would have been happy sharing the same bathroom."

"Tell him, Mr. Conrad," the lawyer coaxed.

Reuben reddened. "That's precatory language, Tyler, expressing the testator's wishes without creating any binding obligations. Marcus Boland could have told you to go fly a diaper, but even if he did want you, the court would have appointed a guardian according to the minor's best interest."

"See us after graduation," Boland said. "Mr. Paige, people don't intend to leave their children as orphans. They hate to create a premature family crisis by naming one of five uncles as guardian. The easiest tactic is to name their lawyer until the problem actually arises, when the lawyer can step aside graciously."

"Dead end, Mr. Boland?"

"Dead end, Mr. Paige."

Glancing around at the discouraged men, Sherry stood up and handed Benjamin Paige's will to the attorney, said, "Many thanks, all the same."

Tyler Paige moved more deliberately, as though no one could ever want to be rid of him. He dusted his trousers, smoothed out his mother's will, stood up, readjusted his chair, peered out the window, then placed the will on Boland's desk, next to the governor's portrait, slightly out of the attorney's reach.

"Within the limitations of your trade, sir, you've been helpful. Thank you."

Only Reuben stayed seated. "This matter was different, Mr. Boland. Your father might have been named guardian as a routine convenience. But if he arranged for the Paige name on Tyler's birth certificate, he clearly knew the identity of Tyler's actual mother. What if your father was supposed to redeliver the baby if Mr. and Mrs. Paige both died? That way Tyler could claim his rights from his natural parents. They might even have preferred the embarrassment to leaving their son a homeless orphan."

"What if? is someone else's business, not mine. I never speculate beyond manageable information."

"Which is why we've got a date with the owner of the Owl Bookstore." Sherry's wave was

friendly as they left. "Should I have mentioned the bookstore?" Sherry asked when they were in the elevator. "We did right not to show Mr. Boland your mother's letter to his father. I'm happy I gave him something to worry about."

"Are we at the 11th floor yet?"

"Just passing it, Reuben. Why?"

"Mr. Boland has already forgotten us."

By contrast, Edith Marshall had a gala reception awaiting them. Dinner finished, with nothing on the menu to disentangle Tyler's past, the three investigators had parked Reuben's car on a hilly side street and walked to the Owl Bookstore for their 8:00 p.m. appointment. A variegated crowd — jeans, dresses, khakis, business suits — greeted their entrance with applause. Some wine-filled plastic cups spilled over at the noisy acclaim.

"Mr. Paige, I *am* honored!" Mrs. Marshall surged through the crowd for an expected kiss on the cheek. Tyler obliged, apprehensive about her large, gold-hoop earrings. The store owner was an attractive, middle-aged woman, ash-blonde, wearing a low-cut peasant blouse and full dark skirt.

"*Dragonmind, A Slight Hunger, Among the Slain, Revenge of Sorts* — I know them *all*. You can write! Why, Mr. Conrad, isn't it? 'Booked for Pleasure.' I love

your show." Reuben, too, planted a kiss.

"Hi. I'm Sherry Stanton." At her hostess' perplexity, she added, "Television producer."

The crowd's background hum carried "*author, reviewer, producer*" to the farthest reaches of the store. Throats cleared and hand patted-back hair. Commerce had joined culture.

"Mrs. Marshall, have you a civilized place to talk?" the author asked.

"Yes, yes, Mr. Paige. I *knew* you'd want to meet your fans first. Such *short notice*, too."

"My readers are a comfort to me." Tyler tried to sound flattered. "My present concern, however, is far more personal and significant."

"Don't you worry, Mr. Paige. We'll close up shop *soon* and take *all the time* you need."

"Soon" was an hour and twenty minutes — and forty-five autographs — later. Eventually, Tyler, Sherry and Reuben joined Mrs. Marshall in her small office in back of the bookstore. Locked glass-enclosed bookcases covered each wall.

"Buying libraries at estate sales is the *best* way I know to get high quality books," Mrs. Marshall said. "At such *reasonable* prices." She was seated in a swivel chair while her three guests ranged along the walls.

"I didn't know Mr. Boland *at all*. The *senior* Mr. Boland. I met

his son, *Walter Boland*, when I bought all those books from that lovely home they were selling after Mr. Boland died. To a *Korean* family, I believe. Whenever I had a free moment, I'd look through the books, just to look through the books. It's fun!

"The letter from Mr. Paige's mother was tucked inside *A Slight Hunger*. First edition. Perfect condition, except for that writing inside. I can't believe the book came from a lending library."

"I'd like to see it," Tyler restrained his anxiety. "How much are you asking?"

As Mrs. Marshall withdrew the volume, she shook her head, wordless for once.

Tyler continued, outwardly calm, "Let me inscribe a copy of *Dragonmind* to you. And I have an extra set of galley proofs . . ." he trailed off, hoping to lure her on.

"I couldn't, Mr. Paige, I just couldn't." She relocked the bookcase. "I'm not a book peddler. Your book has *personal history*. It's priceless to a true collector."

In Tyler's hands, *A Slight Hunger* looked ordinary, barely worth its original \$4.95 price.

"Lending library?" Reuben asked the owner.

"All those dates? What else?" Mrs. Marshall's questions were her answer. "On the inside back cover."

When Tyler opened the book to

the last section, Reuben nudged Sherry ahead of him, where they looked over the author's shoulder. Inked vertical columns, "Jan., Feb., Mar., Apr.," through the entire year, were repeated in a row after parallel row across the endpapers. Most months had a single checkmark in an adjoining column. Some had no marks, others two checks and, rarely, three.

"We had a *daily* rate for our lending library," Mrs. Marshall reminisced aloud. "Here, it's by the *month*. It would be cheaper to buy the book."

Sherry, too, revived the past. "In college I used to write down the date when I started a book, when I picked it up and when I put it down. I scribbled all across *Don Quixote* without ever finishing it. Looked like an almanac." She kicked at Reuben's ankle when he winked at her.

"My best novel . . ." Tyler slapped at the handwritten pages. The book, held loosely, trembled in his other hand.

Eyes wide, Mrs. Marshall reached out. "May I . . ."

"Mrs. Marshall" — Reuben's tone was genial but beseeching — "could you let us photocopy these notes?"

"Yes, yes, Mr. Conrad! The stationery store is *closed* by now. I'll do it *myself*, tomorrow. Do you want the inscription, too?"

"What inscription?" Tyler manhandled the pages, tearing none, to reach the front. On the

page following the title page, where other authors had dedications, Tyler had isolated the theme of his novel. Italicized, it read:

What matter my slight hunger?

My creditors are starving.

Beneath the printed words was a handwritten inscription in a now-familiar script:

Dear Marcus,

Much owed, little paid. Tyler's discovering life. There's such a lot to tell him. Isn't it wonderful to have a talented, inquisitive son?

*As ever,
Joyce*

"Don't you worry about a *thing*, Mr. Paige." Mrs. Marshall touched his arm. "Everything's *safe* with me." Tugging at the book to reassert her ownership, she added, "I'll make copies for you, *gratis*."

Mrs. Marshall, full-hipped, was already stooped over the bookcase, thrusting *A Slight Hunger* back into the cabinet. After relocking the glass door, she tugged twice at the handle. "All secure," she glowed.

Twenty more minutes of talk amounted to talk. Mrs. Marshall paled at every hint of losing her treasures to Tyler. Authors were grand, but books were forever. Collectively, but with divided interests, they all left the store.

To Reuben's surprise, Mrs. Marshall — "Usually I leave earlier and catch a bus" — accepted a lift home, a few blocks away. When she left the car and threw kisses from her doorstep, Reuben said, "How can anyone call her an enemy?"

"I can. Her hobby is my life."

En route to Tyler's downtown hotel, they confirmed that the next day, Wednesday, would bring scheduling problems. Tyler had personal appearances to make, Sherry and Reuben their KRKN jobs to do and Reuben his night law class to attend.

"All for one and one for all — part time."

"Now, Reuben, stop that. One day won't make any difference. I'll have our medical interviewer see if he can learn anything from the hospital where Tyler was born. Thursday, at lunch, we'll add up results. I'll bet someone telephones about the interview, too."

The hotel goodnights were friendly. Reuben's and Sherry's later goodnights were friendlier.

Wednesday, twenty minutes after *Booked for Pleasure* aired, Reuben received the prophesied telephone call. A viewer offered to cast Tyler Paige's horoscope in exchange for a televised interview. Wednesday, late evening, was also the day Edith Marshall died, though only she and her killer knew it immediately.

Reuben heard the news Thurs-

day morning on his alarm-clock radio. Sometime after the Owl closed for business, Mrs. Marshall was stabbed and bludgeoned to death in her office. The room was ripped apart — cabinets smashed, books strewn about, desk drawers emptied — and then set ablaze with book-repair glue as the kindling. Firemen found the body after a bartender phoned in an alarm.

Sherry was half dressed when Reuben, unshaven, rang her doorbell. "Bad news, honey. Edith Marshall's been murdered."

"No, Reuben, *no!* That sweet, funny lady?" She clung to him, a frightened young woman in a bathrobe.

"Uh-huh." Reuben followed her through the living room into her gold-white bedroom. "No suspects. All the way over here, I shivered."

"She was so *alive* Tuesday night. What happened?"

"Robbery, family quarrel, monsters from outer space. You name it, the police can't."

Pausing as she buttoned her blouse, Sherry asked, "Are we involved?"

"Not yet. We should be." Reuben checked himself in the dresser mirror. Though his gray suit was new, his tousled dark hair and day-old beard gave him a seedy look. "I'll shave at the office."

"Tyler?" she asked.

Reuben shook his head slowly. "I don't know, Sherry."

"Worried?"

"Sure?"

For a long moment they held each other. "Reuben, have Tyler meet us."

"Before we call the police?"

Another moment passed. "I'll risk it."

On Sherry's desk when she and Reuben arrived at KRKN was a memo from the staff interviewer who broadcast medical topics.

We finally found the records on Tyler Paige. You owe the Hillside Hospital business manager a 5-part series on his life, plus 3 giant-sized cartons of luxury soap. Parents: Benjamin and Joyce Paige. Date of birth: April 29, 1924. Time: 10:02 p.m. (Did it take exactly 9 months?) Obstetrician: George — or Gerald — B. Streck. Anesthesiologist (sp?): Arthur Lack. Attending nurses: Marilyn J. Willey and Marsha McLaughlin. Where, if alive, no one knows. No birth complications. 6 lbs., 14 oz. Hospital bill paid promptly. I'm still adding up what you owe me.

"Anything worthwhile?"

"Names, Sherry, names. Over fifty years old. How would a wild goose appeal to you?"

"Reuben!"

While Reuben shaved in the men's room, Sherry initialed the memo and filed it in her desk. The filing stay was brief. When

Reuben returned, combed and clean-shaven, Tyler Paige was seated next to the desk, reading the note. The author wore a brown, pinstripe suit with tan shirt and hastily-knotted brown necktie. Upset, he fidgeted in place.

"This doesn't mean a thing." Tyler held the memo out accusingly.

Sherry retrieved it. "Now we're sure your name is — and was — Tyler Paige."

"Whoever *he* is," Reuben added. "Poor Edith Marshall."

"I heard it on the radio right after you called. Only yesterday she had me kiss her on the cheek." Tyler appeared subdued.

"Tuesday," Sherry corrected him.

Frowning, Tyler repeated himself. "*Yesterday*. Last night, when I picked up the photocopies she promised."

"Last night?"

"Yes. Earlier I was busy with my appearances. She thought it was *wonderful* we could be alone to talk. I left as politely as I could. If I had asked her out for a drink . . ."

"You would have been killed in a bar holdup. Look, Tyler," Reuben wavered between sympathy and suspicion, "we don't know each other. Maybe, before we go to the police, you'd like to call a lawyer."

Tyler held out his hand. "No matter what I am, Reuben, you want me treated fairly. It's so

easy to misjudge people. To think I was afraid Mrs. Marshall was a blackmailer."

"Wasn't I right?" Sherry reminded them. "I told you blackmail was a mistake."

At the Hall of Justice, half a mile from the KRKN offices, Tyler, Sherry and Reuben felt they were touring a realistic set created by one of the large networks. The homicide inspectors were respectful in a professionally hostile way. After warning their visitors of their rights, the officers interrogated them separately, then again as a group.

On request, the "citizen-observers" provided fingerprints, shoeprints, plus hair, blood and skin samples. A physical examination followed, for scratches and bite marks. ("That lady fought!") Permission was requested — and granted — for the police to examine their wardrobes, especially the clothing they wore on Wednesday night.

The officer who scouted through Reuben's clothes hamper said only, "You'd have to hire a mother to love this mess."

A hired mother . . . Reuben rechecked the photocopies of the Tyler Paige material and telephoned Sherry. With small protest, she agreed to do what he asked.

Seeing Walter Boland was more difficult. The 17th floor was still invulnerable to transients.

"Mr. Boland is much too busy,"

the receptionist insisted.

On borrowed stationery, Reuben wrote a short note, sealed it in a Boland and Boland envelope, and asked the receptionist to pass it along to Mr. Boland.

The response was quick. As briskly silent as on the last visit, the attorney's secretary brought Reuben to the inner office. Seated behind the desk he shared with the governor's photograph, Boland neither rose nor offered Reuben a chair. On Boland's face and right hand were drugstore-bought bandages, tinted brown to match his tan.

"Mr. Conrad, your note says, 'I understand you were injured last night. Anyone I know?' That sounds like a cleverly passed threat."

"A carefully phrased deduction. The police want the person who left skin fragments in Edith Marshall's fingernails."

"I fell while jogging. Next time I see the mayor I'll demand a leash law."

Seething, Reuben dropped into a chair. "When did your uncle die?"

Boland mixed bewilderment with contempt. "My uncle Samuel or my uncle Cedric?"

"Your uncle George — or Gerald — B. Streck. Your mother's brother. The obstetrician who delivered Tyler." Reuben pointed at Boland's Supreme Court admission certificate: Walter Streck Boland.

"A family name, isn't it? Streck! How difficult to fake a birth certificate when the doctor's honest! How easy when both he and the family lawyer are part of the scheme!"

For Boland, Reuben might have been discussing the humidity in Brazil. The attorney tilted back his chair, too indifferent to interrupt.

Reuben went on. "I don't know whether you found more of your father's papers or figured out what bothered me when I reread Mrs. Paige's notes to him. Our Mrs. Paige, revisited, wasn't much of a darling. She was a hard-bargaining, hired mother who wrote to your father for money to stay out of his sight.

"I'll be supplying Tyler's allowance for a long time . . . I never get enough money for us . . . Much owed, little paid . . .'" Those are disguised demand notes, revealing just enough to frighten your father. Pay up or — watch out! — I'll send the little bastard after you.

"Even in these times an illegitimate child can ruin a reputation — or snarl up an estate. A reaction Mr. Boland?" Reuben challenged the attorney's grimace. "What about those columns in back of *A Slight Hunger*?"

"Compulsive doodling."

"Which you shouldn't have known about. Right? Don't be too smug. Those dates and marks were your father's bookkeeping

entries. When he paid Mrs. Paige — with an account that's bound to be traceable — he must have checked off the month. Skipped payments brought more mail."

"If you're finished . . ." Boland swept his hand, palm up, to chase Reuben away.

"Almost. Sherry Stanton should be here soon, when she's finished with an affidavit. Give your dad credit for the guardianship provision in the will. He probably didn't want Tyler completely abandoned if the Paiges both died."

"He probably expected more pay for additional services, Mr. Conrad. To a lawyer, time is money."

Ignoring the hint, Reuben said grimly, "The bookstore owner, Mrs. Marshall, died because she wouldn't surrender the first-hand evidence — the actual documents in your father's handwriting and in Mrs. Paige's handwriting — to prove Tyler's background. Gaps, yes. But what a good beginning."

Once again, Boland swept his hand towards the door.

"No, Mr. Boland. You see, Tyler Paige has to be your older brother, sharing both the same parents. The real Joyce Paige sold her services and her name. The woman who borrowed the name for Tyler's birth was surely your own mother, Miss Streck, attended by her brother and protected by the lover she later

married — Marcus Boland, your father. Your family secret . . ."

Though the intercom buzzed, Reuben finished his thought before Boland picked up the receiver.

" . . . lasted a long time."

When the caller spoke Boland flashed a bitter look at Reuben. "Right now?" he demanded. "Okay, okay, stop whining." Hanging up, he pounded once on the table, hard enough to make the portrait tremble. "*Get out!*"

Reuben hesitated. "With a citizen-informer, police need little probably cause. Sherry's affidavit was for a search warrant. May I stay?"

Boland leaped at Reuben. A moment later the police entered. A black eye kept Reuben off the air for nearly a week. By the time Boland went to trial, his broken nose had healed. But that Thursday afternoon, over coffee at the cafeteria where they had first congregated, Reuben's audience — Tyler and Sherry — ignored his eyepatch.

"The scratches, bites and hair samples are right in line to convict him," he explained.

"Why ever did he keep Edith Marshall's copy of *A Slight Hunger* and the letter in his car trunk?" Sherry puzzled. "I would have destroyed them."

"Greed, not literary taste," Reuben patted Tyler's arm. "The book and letter were clean, had no bloodstains and originally came

from the Boland library. Later on, Walter could say almost anything. "She mailed it to me before she was killed."

"We were so interested in the Boland money for Tyler we overlooked something. Tyler's rich. If something happened to him,

and Walter Boland could show he was Tyler's surviving brother, we'd have kept the next murder within the family."

Tray in hand, a passing patron slowed at their table. "No," he apologized. "I thought you looked like somebody." ●



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The Goldfish Bowl

by NICK O'DONOHUE

The Minneapolis Police and the D.A. were stuck on two counts — who had killed the Graver and where was the heroin stashed. So they called in Cartley and Phillips to be the fall guys — and got an amazing solution to both crimes.

SO FAR I HAD WON four bucks, and it wasn't even noon yet. I figured if I said, "Hit me, Roy," one more time, Cartley would ball up his fist and do just that. So I checked with a hole ace and the six of hearts showing. It won't do to antagonize a senior partner, especially when he's your only partner.

He grinned. "Lose your nerve, Nate? With your luck, why worry?"

"Standing pat. Shut up and answer the phone. You gonna let it ring all day?" That was unfair.

It had only rung once so far.

"They'll stay on if they want us." Which was gutsy — we hadn't been hired in two weeks. He dealt a ten beside his three-spot, scowled, and flipped the two of them face down. He stood up to dig a quarter out of his right-hand pocket, picking up the phone at the same time.

"Cartley and Phillips, Detectives." He flipped the quarter to me. "Hey, Jon. Calling for good news?" He listened, then said slowly and thoughtfully, "No, Lieutenant, I think we could fit

another job in." He grinned at me. "What are you doing, running an employment agency out of Headquarters? How come you know what the D.A. wants?" Pause. "Oh? What's the address?"

While he was turned around scribbling I sneaked a look at his hole-card; for him to be over twenty-one it had to be at least a nine. It was the four of diamonds. Cartley knew I was fresh out of cash, the bastard. I was back in my chair when he turned around. "What's up?"

He put the phone down. "Can you learn to wait until I've hung up to say 'what's up?' You're not that young, and I once thought I hired you for brains."

"For quick brains, not steady ones. Besides, it was only Jon Pederson, and he's a friend."

"He's also a police lieutenant in Homicide. He called to tell us he's got a job for us."

"My, my, and I didn't even know we had uniforms."

"We don't — that's why we're hired. Let's go."

"Where?"

He flourished a scrap he had written the address on. "To one sixty-eight South Water, an apartment on the second floor, where the Minneapolis Police will hand us a phone to talk to the District Attorney. We're a 'special force selected by the attorney on the advice of law enforcement officials.' "

"You sound like you're quoting

a paper." We were down to the street by now.

"I am — tomorrow's *Minneapolis Trib*, or else the *Star*, about halfway down the front page." Suddenly he looked tired. I edged ahead of him and slid into the driver's seat. He handed me the keys without comment. For once, he looked more than fifty-odd — usually he looked a paunchy forty.

We cut around downtown to save time. "So why hire us instead of using his staff? And why not keep everything quiet?"

"It's an election year."

"So?"

"My God, Nate, don't you read anything besides the funny papers and the labels of cat-food cans? Something is up with too much publicity to handle in an election year if there's a chance of blowing it. So he hires us, with a great public display.

"If we blow it, he fires us, with a great public display. If we do all right, he pats his staff on the back and tells the press it was his 'well-picked investigators' that did it — and he takes the credit. Either way he comes out on top. It's all very public, with lots of good shots of his profile." He grunted. "Straighten your tie, Nate — we're doing this job in a goldfish bowl."

I pulled in about a block from the place. We weren't hired yet, and we'd look funny nestled in among the cop-cars. It was a warm, pleasant day, and walking

gave us more time to talk.

"Say Roy," I asked as I fiddled uselessly with my hair, "How come Homicide told us about a job for the D.A.?"

He snickered. "I said it involved publicity. What do you think?"

Put that way, it wasn't hard to figure out at all. Just nasty.

A COP MY AGE or younger opened the door — for us, we thought, but then two attendants wheeled out something in a sheet. A skinny man behind them, in the act of taking off a lab coat, stopped and grinned.

"Roy! They said you were coming. I'm just taking him out." He jerked a thumb at the sheet. "Want to look at him before I go?"

"No thanks," Cartley said, and shook hands. "I want to eat a big lunch in an hour. How you doing, Grover?"

"Fine, fine." He looked down at himself. "Maybe that's my trouble. I do so much of this work before meals. How are you, young Nate? Haven't seen you in months."

"Doing fine, Grover. Good to see you." He opened his mouth, and I said quickly, "And I don't want to look at him now, either." He laughed.

Grover Spynetzky, nicknamed Graver because of his job, was quick-witted, gregarious and the most dedicated coroner you could imagine. His only problem was

how steeped he was in his work. If you didn't move or speak when he first saw you, he'd look at you with what Roy called his 'by-the-pound' look.

Roy loved to tell the story about the time an elderly lady fell asleep while waiting at headquarters and woke up with a scream when Grover absently pulled her arms straight by her sides. He was one of the friendliest people you'd ever hope to meet — but God, he spooked me.

We told him we'd stop by later, and dodged past the body into the apartment. We found ourselves in the living room. The room had a deep green shag carpet; in its middle was a stain that looked grey but shouldn't have. A man's outline was sketched across it, neatly and precisely.

That was the last neat and precise thing in the place. Books were thrown out of the shelves. All the cabinets were open, and their contents strewn in front of them. The sofa cushions were ripped and their stuffing scattered liberally around the room. And there were policemen kneeling on the rug, looking at it intently.

One of them was Jon Pederson, squinting at the floor and muttering. Roy walked over until his feet blocked Jon's view and said solemnly, "Brother Nathan and I haven't seen the light yet, but we'll get down on our knees if you want. We forgot our prayer books, though."

He didn't even look up. "That's got to be Roy Cartley. Nobody else's feet take up that much space. No, it's not a prayer meeting, and that puddle you almost stepped in isn't the Blood of the Lamb, either."

I came up. "Lieutenant —"

"Jon."

"Lieutenant Jon, why is it grey? It looks like somebody shot a shadow in here."

"Complementary colors. The red and the green do bad things to each other." He looked at the pool in disgust. "Suits him, though. He was a dirty little man with bad habits."

Roy said quietly, "Nobody's told us who he was or what we're doing here."

"Mmmmmm?" Pederson looked up near-sightedly. "Phone's in the kitchen. Call the D.A.'s office, you poor idiots. I had to."

I called over my shoulder as we left the room, "Don't find anything till we get back."

"We won't," one of the younger cops said. Pederson looked at him, and the rookie found a passionate interest in the carpet.

The phone call was brief. Yes, we were willing to work. No, we wouldn't talk unduly to the press — whatever 'unduly' meant. And yes, we would get filled in and show up at his office to be sworn in, if he didn't mind our having lunch before we came over. Roy did the talking. I stood around,

trying to look young and alert. These days, I was getting better at the second and worse at the first.

The kitchen was as bad as the living-room. The floursack was split, the powdered sugar was spilled, even the cereal boxes had been ripped open. Someone had been looking for something important, important and easy to hide.

I noticed a memo by the phone — *Buy new fish, fishfood.*

I didn't remember having seen a fish tank, or any fish, for that matter; I looked behind me. The tank was to the left of the door, which was why I hadn't seen it. It had a sealed glass top and was nearly full of water. The gravel, or fake gravel, in the tank looked untidy, as though someone had been rummaging in it; the plastic plants were lying and floating at odd angles. No fish.

We went back to the living room. Pederson, looking Nordic and depressed, was sitting on the destroyed sofa, cupping a cigar over an ashtray.

"So," Roy said cheerfully, "Church is out, huh? What were you doing on your knees?"

He lit a cigaret. Pederson grabbed his hand. "Hold it over an ashtray, will you? This place is covered with sofa-stuffing, scrap-paper, and torn cloth; one ember would take out the building."

Roy grudgingly got an ashtray and put it on his knee while I

asked, "Seriously, what were you looking for?"

Pederson kicked resentfully at the shag carpet. "For about a hundred sections of plastic tube, or twenty long ones, or else one hell of a long one, hidded around here somewhere. It's thin enough to hide under the shag; if you taped it down, anyone could step on it and not notice they had, unless they were looking for it."

"Heroin or cocaine?" He looked at me in surprise, and I added, "I saw the flour-sack and the ripped-open sugar box."

He nodded. "Heroin. And you missed the powdered milk, Phillips."

"Unh. Did whoever searched this place miss it?"

The lieutenant waved an arm. "Does it look like he missed anything?" He puffed on his cigar and went on, "The victim was Francis Marion Munsch, known to his friends as 'Murray' Munsch. He preferred it that way. If I'd been named Francis Marion, so would I."

"Murray was a wholesaler; nothing small about him. He brought in large heroin shipments at irregular intervals — sometimes nothing for months, sometimes three in a month. He changed suppliers every three shipments, out of caution. He changed buyers almost as often — then he had a sure-fire way of getting rid of."

"He raised prices until *they* told *him* to go to hell. It cut down

some of his risks. Obviously, it raised others. All this means he was involved with too many people to check out at once."

"He means 'before elections,' " Cartley stage-whispered. Pederson ignored him and went on.

"We've watched him on and off, but he never tipped his hand. Then, last week, he got a shipment in, one to top most all shipments you've heard of. Three kilograms, Asian white, totally uncut — that's what we heard, anyway. He got rid of two before we had time to act, and the last one was still up here."

"Fast work — not New York City's style, but fine for Minneapolis," I said. "Better than we need or want. What of it?"

"We had a stake-out for his last sale, and we had to pull it very briefly. A draw play — somebody down the street started a fight. The cop broke it up, called another car to take care of it and went back to his post."

"He realized after a couple of hours he'd been taken, and risked going up. He was right, too — Munsch had been shot; and whoever did it had gone out the fire-escape. Once in the chest, probably with a silencer."

"Bet you didn't know you could silence large-calibre — hell, you can silence anything if you're willing to risk the action jamming for the second shot." He looked at the stain, then back at me.

"One shot looks like enough, anyhow."

"So what happened to the heroin?"

"That's what we want to know. Something must have gone wrong, and Murray Munsch got shot before he said where the stuff was. Someone searched. I don't think he found it."

"Why not? I can't believe he didn't find it if it was here."

Pederson said with what for him was patience, "Use your damn head, Phillips. Why do you always find what you're looking for in the last place you look?"

"Because, after that, you stop looking," Roy said promptly. Roy knows hundreds of that kind of joke. He tells them at parties a lot. People spill drinks on him, but it never does any good.

"You *would* know. Well, look around. Either the searcher didn't find anything, or he found it in the last possible place."

He was right. Nothing was untouched. Anything you could hide things in was open — anything you could hide things behind had been moved.

"So," I said, "if it's in here, why didn't he find it?"

"Beats me. Look, what do you want? We've been on this five hours. We've barely had time to think, and we wasted that time hiring you two."

"Never mind." I looked again at the fish tank. "He could have taken it out of the tank, and

messed up the other things to throw us off."

"No way. Displacement."

"What?"

"Go ahead; reach into that tank."

I rolled up my sleeves and pulled on the lid; it came loose with a sucking sound. I hesitated and said, "Prints?"

Pederson looked disgusted.

"No, I'm only a cop and wouldn't think of things like that. No prints anywhere. Now, go ahead."

I felt around in the gravel, but couldn't find anything. The water nearly slopped over when I had my arm in.

"Pretty full aquarium, isn't it, Nate? Now, imagine a package in the bottom of it, and imagine reaching in and displacing the water you just did, plus what the package displaces. You'd have water all over that shelf, right?"

"Well, there's dust on that shelf from weeks ago — and the books underneath aren't wet, either. Nothing bulky went in and out of that tank in the last three weeks."

Cartley chuckled at my embarrassment. Then he said carelessly, "Why do you think the stuff's in tubing?"

He does that — asks things out of the blue after letting me dig out routine stuff, so he can sort answers in peace.

"There was some tubing with the aquarium pump. The pump's still out in the kitchen."

"I figured there'd be a pump; I was going to ask." We both looked at him. "All right, *don't* believe me. Mind if I look at it?"

As he walked out, I said, "Lieut — Jon, why isn't that pump in the aquarium?"

He nodded at me sagely. "Now you're thinking. He bought the pump and tank; I think, as a blind for the tubing that went with it. There was one section of it attached to the pump. He didn't bother putting it in the tank, or else he didn't get it done before his visitor came — I don't know which. But that's why I've looked through this carpet, and everywhere else, for tubing."

Roy's voice from the kitchen startled us. "Did he live here all the time? Pretty crummy place for a rich dealer."

"Oh, hell, no. I told you he was cautious. He kept this place for business deals, and stayed here when something was up. That's why the stuff should be hidden here — he wouldn't have put it in his penthouse and didn't have any other place to put it."

"Yeah." Roy came back out and scratched above his ear. "Sure. Got anything more to tell us before we go see the D.A. and get official?"

Pederson stood up and stubbed out his cigar, which was out anyway. "Only that you have our full cooperation — and we damn well better have yours." He sighed and knelt on the rug again. "We'll

have fact-sheets for you this afternoon. Good luck. The D.A. plans on having you either nailed or forgotten, depending on how this comes out, you know that?"

"We get paid either way." Cartley put on his hat. We bent down and shook hands with Jon, then left.

THE D.A. WAS BRIEF and almost to the point. He instructed us with reporters present. I've never heard anyone be that blunt and still be vague. It would have been funny except that he was going to axe us or bury us when he wanted to.

We took our little badges and went back to the car. "Say, Nate," Roy said as he looked his over, "now that we've got these badges, what you want to do with them?"

"You do what you want, but I'm gonna get me a magnifying glass and a toy gun and look just like a real cop." I turned up my collar and hunched over the wheel. "Think anyone will recognize me?"

"Cut that out!" But he was smiling. "We've kept our mouths shut on cue and posed for pictures. Now we've got to do something for all this glory." He polished his badge and pinned it under his lapel. I kept driving toward our office.

"All right," I sighed and straightened my collar. "I'll be a good little almost-cop. You want to go to the office and call Headquarters, in case they have some-

thing on this goof-up for us?"

"Nope," Cartley said thoughtfully. "We're going to go find the Fish Salon on Washington Street." I turned and looked at him; he nearly grabbed the wheel away. "Damn it, Nate, if you can't think and you can't behave, you can at least watch the road. You're a threat to free men everywhere."

"Nuts. I'll be rolling around long after you've cashed in your chips on a freeway railing." I turned left across two lanes, just in front of two delivery trucks and a van.

He covered his eyes. "Not if you kill us both now." Out of consideration for him I drove more slowly, or at least more reasonably. He gave me an address not too far from downtown.

"Now," I said as we parked and he exhaled, "Why are we here?"

He shook his head. "I'm still trying to figure out *how*. We're here because Munsch bought the fish-tank here." He held up a green tag, stuck on the inside of a matchbook. "Since we're investigators, it isn't even withholding evidence. I took it from the bottom of the pump."

"A price sticker. So?"

"So I'll bet he bought the pump not too long ago. The tank wasn't stained at the water level the way old tanks are, either. He bought all his fish paraphernalia recently."

"Aha!" I said. "Keeping unlicensed fish equipment. Did the D.A. make us indoor game-wardens?"

"Nice, Nate. Shut up and think. If he bought that stuff recently, why did he say 'new fish' in his memo? He never had any old fish."

We got out of the car, and I added thoughtfully, "And it's pretty suspicious that he'd run out of fish and fish-food at the same time — do you think he starved the old ones to death?"

"Okay, laugh at me — but that fish tank is important. Crooked men don't lie for fun." We went in the store, still arguing, but about what was wrong with the Minnesota Twins this season.

We broke off when an old man came out of the back, but not your feeble old kindly fish-raiser. He was over six and a half feet tall, with shoulders as wide as a park bench. In the light from the fish tanks, he was the color of the Statue of Liberty. Maybe he was her little brother.

He was carrying a glass bowl about three feet across and eight inches deep. In his arms it looked like a soup bowl. He smiled and said in a surprisingly high voice, "Be with you in a second."

He set the tank down carefully, wiped his arms on a towel at the counter and turned to us.

"What would you like?"

"A no-hitter against the Yankees," I said irritably, "but

Roy here wants a lousy fish tank."

"You'll have to go someplace else." He winked. "I only stock good ones."

"I'd take one of those," Roy offered. "It's for the wife." I nearly lost it. Mrs. Cartley hates fish, fried or alive, almost as much as she hates being called 'the wife.'

"What size?" The big man gestured around the store. He had everything from fist-size bowls to tanks you could take a bath in.

"Let's see now — about three feet by two by one, anything like that here?"

He nodded. "I've got a couple." We went to the back shelves.

Cartley pointed at a tank identical to Munsch's. "That one looks good." He peered at the price tag.

I said, "Now, watch you don't get took, Roy. You know anyone that buys these?" I enjoy playing rotten people.

Roy said, "Forgive him, Mr. —"

"Brandt."

"Brandt. He never saw any polite folks much. They're all like him at home." I growled and they laughed. Cartley added, "Have you sold any of these recently?"

"Sure — one a couple of days ago, in fact."

"Any complaints, or is it too soon to tell?"

He shrugged. "Usually if they don't complain right away, then the tank's good."

"Any fish come with it?" I interrupted. "Just to sort of sweeten up Roy's wife?"

"Sorry. No deals."

"Come on. You made that other guy pay for fish after he bought a tank this size?"

Brandt's patience held. "He didn't buy fish."

"Well, on a fishnet then."

"No fishnet, either. Just a pump and some plants and artificial gravel — and no bargains on any of those. Do you want to buy anything?" His voice had an edge now.

"Not a chance," I said, less annoyingly. "My place is too small for a fish tank."

"I *knew* I forgot something!" Roy snapped his fingers. "I didn't measure the sideboard! It might not have enough space for this tank."

"Looks close," I agreed.

Roy said to Brandt, "Tell you what — I'll go measure, and be back tomorrow if it fits."

"If I get a chance to sell this one, out it goes," Brandt warned. "Don't sell many that size, you know — I've got to sell 'em when I can."

Cartley thanked him. "Come on, Nate, before you break something." We threaded our way past the swordtails, the neon tetras, and the inevitable guppies; we blinked after leaving the dim, greenlit shop for the late-afternoon sunlight.

Getting in the car, I said, "I

wanted to see you buy a tank."

"I wanted to see him punch you out. We both came close to getting what we wanted."

"What I really want is supper."

"Already? You'll be as fat as I am before you're thirty-five. I'll get the drug-and-murder files from the police. Then why don't we go out someplace and work on this over dinner?"

"Sounds good. I'll mind the office for another hour, then meet you."

We drove off. Roy grabbed for the dashboard. "I thought I was gonna drive back . . ."

He didn't even bring the files to dinner — they weren't any help. We knew they wouldn't be — they hadn't been to the police, and we weren't any smarter than two separate investigating teams.

"Didn't I tell you?" Cartley complained over roast beef and mashed potatoes.

"You didn't," I agreed. "But if they'd had anything to go on, the D.A. never would have set us up for this job."

He took a mouthful of potato and swallowed. "I still think that aquarium is important."

I waved a fork at him. "Munsch, wasn't killed with it. He didn't put packages of heroin in it. What good is it?"

"Nate, you don't think of good questions, you don't ask good questions, you don't even *want* good questions. What made you become a private eye?"

"Curiosity. All right, since we can't find the drugs or the guy that killed for them, let's investigate the fish tank. He can't have wanted it there."

"Why not?"

"He only went to that place to make deals, right?" And he went there on an irregular basis. Remember the foodstuffs? Flour, sugar, powdered milk. Nothing perishable — he didn't plan on going there often. You can't even keep goldfish that irregularly. You would have thought of that, Roy, if you'd kept a cat or a —"

"I was always going to ask that cat of yours what he's good for."

"Don't ask him, ask forty-seven female cats." Roy choked. "But Munsch filled the tank with water, which shows he wasn't moving it anywhere. All right, he wasn't going to keep fish. Still, we know he didn't hide packets of heroin in it. Pretty dumb place to hide it anyway — it'd be like hiding sugar in a swimming pool." I excused myself and went to the john. I noticed as I left that Cartley was looking at me strangely.

When I got back the waitress had brought us more water. "Take a sip," Roy said. "It'll clear your mind." He was grinning across three-quarters of his face.

I took a swallow and grimaced. "Funny, Roy. Next you'll wear a handshake buzzer to Headquarters and they'll throw you in the slammer. How much sugar is in there?"

He moved his plate aside and showed me three torn, completely empty packets, and I understood.

I set the glasses side by side, then sipped his. "Not a speck of difference between them, to look at," I said wonderingly. "I wish I'd thought of that."

Cartley chuckled happily. "We could have taken that place apart and not found anything. Munsch must have filled the tank with distilled water, heated would make it easier, and put the smack in solution; then he sealed it up to prevent evaporation, and waited for a buyer. Heroin's pretty soluble — you could probably put four times that amount into the tank."

"What about getting it back out?"

"Why bother? Just evaporate some water from stronger, dilute it for weaker jolts. You'd have to take some precautions to keep it from breaking down, but he'd take them."

I was still thinking aloud. "Pederson was probably right about the plastic tubing. You could pump the solution into them, maybe in sections of ten to twenty jolts each, and retail it without looking like you were selling anything but water." I shook my head. "He was starting for heroin what fast-food places did for hamburgers."

"The stuff might break down before it got used."

"If he got his money, do you

think he'd care?"

"Finish your food, Nate. You better go over there and tell the cop who's staking out the place where the stuff is." Cartley looked worried. "If we could figure out where it was, so could someone else — and there's been one murder for it already."

"I could call."

"Someone could tap Munsch's line — go over."

"I'll stop at a drug store on the way there," I promised, "and get a sample bottle, just to make sure."

"Go ahead. If you get your hand wet taking the sample, don't suck your thumb — you might get off."

I put on my coat and left. The nights are still cold in Minnesota springtime. I wished for a cap. The sun was setting as I got to the drug store. When I left, it was completely dark.

I parked my car a block down on Water Street, not wanting to blow the stake-out, and walked up. The lights were on. That didn't seem like much of a way to catch a thief. I thought all the way down the block and up the stairs.

After this, we had to find out who Munsch had been selling to. It had to be somebody who could handle heroin in solution. Somebody who could buy plastic tubing and distribute it without comment. Somebody — I figured it out as I knocked on the door. No answer,

of course. I drew my gun and held it at my side as I opened the door. I called in.

Nobody answered. I looked around the room: There were the cop's magazines, his hat and coat, and his reading lamp still on.

The lamp had a shadow under it, on the carpet. Lamps shouldn't. It was a grey pool, like somebody had shot a shadow.

I dove for the floor, and hit the light switch as I went. I took quick aim and shot the reading lamp out. The room was dark. A gun popped, muffled, and a slug big enough to play pool with slammed into the doorframe.

I rolled to my left and crawled behind a chair. I was in a bad way; whoever was shooting at me had probably chalked up two murders in twenty-four hours, and was looking for a third. I crawled until I bumped into a table leg, felt my way up the table leg, then groped along the tabletop until I found the lamp and switch.

Meanwhile I heard a soft metallic noise that put my hair on end when I'd placed it. Someone across the room was unscrewing a silencer from his gun barrel. That meant he expected a lot of gunplay. With a .38, I could barely even come out on top by being lucky.

So I turned on the light, jumped up quickly, and fired once across the room, putting a hole about halfway up on the fishtank.

There was a loud, high shriek,

and Brandt leapt from behind the gutted sofa and tried to plug the leak with one hand and shoot the other. He wasn't steady enough one-handed.

I ducked inside his gun and tackled him, knocking him away from the tank and spinning his gun across the room. He went down; water streamed out of the tank and across us both.

Unarmed as he was, he was big enough to take me and my gun both — if he hadn't kept trying to get back to the tank. I hit him on the temple with my gun-butt, then stood back, panting, as he sagged.

I found the cop in the bedroom, bleeding from his shoulder and from a nasty scalp wound. He was unconscious but alive. I took his handcuffs and snapped them on Brandt. The phone rang; I picked it up.

"Nate." It was Cartley. "The goldfish dealer. It might have been him, and we tipped —"

"If you want to talk to him I'll wake him up. Call the police and an ambulance, will you?"

"Sure. He had plenty of tubing available, and he'd have a perfect cover for reselling the tube-sections. Is that how you guessed, too?"

"Partly," I said, "but who else would have put the lid on an empty aquarium automatically? It had to be him."

There was a moment's silence, then Cartley said, "The hell with

you," and hung up.

The police came — Cartley must have called them as soon as he hung up — and so did the ambulance. I helped wake Brandt, and rode down with him to the station. All the way he gave me instructions about taking care of his store — heating the tanks, feeding the different fish, and so on. I told him he could use his one phone call to instruct his store clerk.

"But aren't you concerned?"

he fluted, close to tears.

"Not a bit. Never saw much point in fish; I keep a cat myself."

"How *can* you?" he burst out.

"Cats are brutal and ravenous. Cats are wicked."

I thought of a dead man and a cop with a fractured skull, and didn't speak to him again even when he and I posed with Cartley and the D.A. for Page One. The D.A., of course, was in front of us. ●

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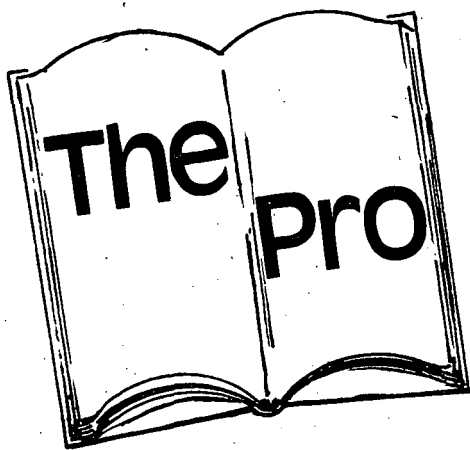
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by **ROBERT H. CURTIS**

It was a profitable morning for the hotel thief — until he got home and counted his loot.

MRS. HENRIETTA MARSHALL looked at herself in the faded mirror. The reflection did not please her. In her bathrobe and out of her girdle, she appeared to herself fat and old. Usually an inborn optimism and energy would have prevented any sort of self-pity but she felt sad now about leaving New York.

The depressing hotel room itself played no part in her feelings. Mid-town commercial hotels had been familiar to her for over forty years and she stayed at places like this all over the country. But she always regretted her departures from New York. She saw so many old friends in this city. Mrs.

Marshall spent more time on the road than in the small Iowa town where she lived — hardly a place people would visit on vacation.

"Oh well," she mused. "I've got at least ten years before I have to call it quits completely." She scanned the room and sighed as she contemplated her half-packed suitcase lying like an open-faced sandwich on the bed. She looked at her alarm clock — 11:15 a.m. Two hours until plane time and, tomorrow morning, back to work in Chicago.

She looked into the mirror again and noticed the doorknob turning and the door slowly opening. The reflection revealed a thin, sallow man in his thirties. Mrs. Marshall was about to tell him that he was in the wrong room, but before she could get one word out, the man said "Be quiet!" in a voice chilling in its hatred. "I want money and jewelry. In exchange for your cooperation, you get to keep all your teeth."

"Nothing I have is valuable," she protested. She was standing now, hugging her bathrobe tightly to herself.

The intruder placed his attache case on the bed and opened it. "Listen you!" the man said. "Don't waste my time. Hand me your purse."

Mrs. Marshall did as instructed and the man held the purse in his left hand as he rapidly went through her suitcase. He was angry at finding nothing of value.

Now Mrs. Marshall watched helplessly as he emptied the contents of her purse on the bed. He picked up her wallet and counted the money.

"Two hundred and fifty-three dollars. Stupid women like you always carry a lot of cash. That's 'cause you can't travel with your mattresses." He stuffed his money into his own wallet, which he replaced in the inside pocket of his jacket. Then he put Mrs. Marshall's small gold compact into his case.

"You're not even leaving me cab fare," she complained. "I'm going to the airport in an hour."

"Don't con me. You got travelers checks right there." He pointed. "You're just lucky that forgery's not my bag. Nothing much from you," he muttered, "but sometimes hitting a dump this pays off. *Look!*"

He touched the case. Mrs. Marshall saw only some burglar tools and a thin jewel box. But then the man opened the box and Mrs. Marshall gasped. Outlined against the black velvet was the most beautiful necklace she had ever seen. Made from perfectly matched natural pearls, it glistered so hypnotically that she felt an almost palpable need to touch.

The man laughed unpleasantly. "All your dough wouldn't have bought you three pearls from this baby." He closed the jewel box and then the attache case. Moving to the dresser, he rifled through

the drawers but found nothing. "You don't have any jewelry at all? That's hard to believe."

"You've taken everything from me. Isn't that enough?" she asked as her eyes darted to the closet and back again.

Her eye movements did not go undetected and the man walked to the closet and pushed each dress to one side after a brief inspection. Finally he spotted a cameo brooch. He tried to remove it but had some difficulty with the clasp.

While the man was struggling with the brooch, Mrs. Marshall eased towards the night table and silently removed something from it. Just then, and as the man was about to rip the pin from the dress, the clasp released and the man pocketed the brooch. As he came to pick up his attache case from the bed, he was almost knocked off his feet as Mrs. Marshall tripped on the rug.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she said.

"Idiot!" the man snarled. His face was only inches from hers. "I'm leaving now. You make a move for the phone or call out in the next ten minutes and you'll *really* be sorry."

The burglar ran to the stair well and raced down two flights, entering the crowded lobby without fuss. He walked calmly to the revolving door and disappeared into the noon crowd along Lexington Avenue. A half hour later, he entered the elevator of an apartment house on Third Avenue

in the mid 90's. He got out at the fourth floor, let himself into his room and sat down on the sofa.

He paused for a moment, anticipating the joy he would feel when he surveyed the spoils of his must successful morning. Now he was ready. He pressed the latch of the case and opened it. At first he couldn't believe what he saw, but then he let out a moan. Gone were his tools, gone was the gold compact, and gone was the thin box with the pearl necklace. Only a black book lay in the case.

He felt panic for a moment but then realized that he must have placed the necklace in his inside pocket. He reached in his jacket and broke out in a cold sweat. Not only was the necklace not

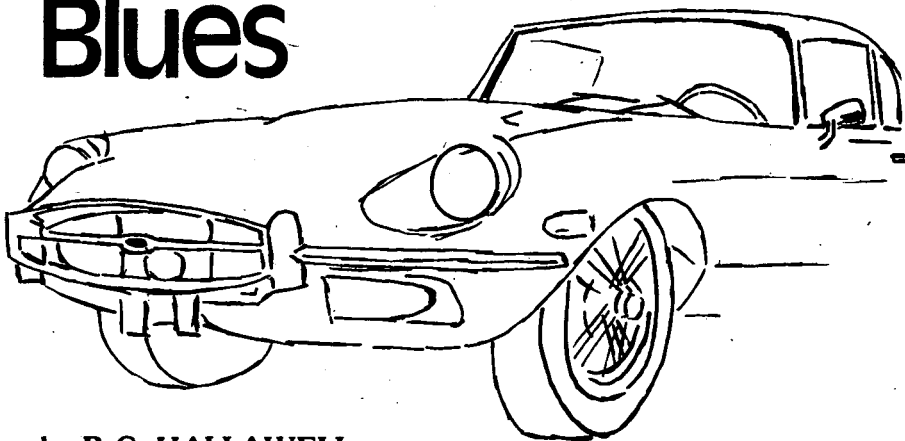
there but his wallet was missing. Hurriedly getting back to the attache case, he picked up the black book. It was a *Gideon Bible*.

He opened it and found, between the cover and the flyleaf a sheet of heavy writing-paper, half of which was occupied by a slightly gaudy lithographic heading. It showed a number of men in old-fashioned evening clothes, cowering before a younger, slimmer, but easily recognizable Mrs. Marshall, who smilingly held aloft a double handful of watches, vest, suspenders and wallets.

The caption read: *Madame Henrietta, The American Sorceress. Conjuress-Illusionist-Prestidigator. Bookings Available.*



Back Seat Blues



by R.G. HALLAWELL

Jack Wells was used to hot-wiring hot cars — but the Jaguar was a bit too hot.

THE PERSISTENT nerve-jangling sound hammered me awake. I unsmothered myself from the pillow and groped with one hand into the bedroom's darkness, hoping to make contact with the phone. Somehow I missed the Bell System and floored a glass ashtray into shattered oblivion. After exhausting my four-letter-word vocabulary, I hit the light switch and looked at my watch. It was five a.m.

"This is a recording. Leave your damn name and number and go back to bed," I told the green

plastic receiver. A vaguely familiar phone voice blasted out a reply that traced my ancestry back to a female canine.

"Is that you, Keller?" I asked.

"Hell yes, it's me! I'm the guy who hands you a paycheck every Friday, remember? Now wake up and listen. Be at Garner Avenue and Eighteenth Street at daylight. I want you to pick up a red Jag for me. It's locked, so bring your tool kit."

I took two steps and reached for a cigaret — and yelled bloody murder. I'd forgotten my bare

feet and the shattered glass on the floor. Maybe they could do it in India, but my glass-walking act needed a lot of polishing.

"Is that scream a 'yes' or a 'no'?" Keller asked.

"At five in the morning, with two pieces of glass sticking out of my left foot, it costs you two hundred bucks. Take it — leave it — or shove it up your finance company!" I yelled.

"You got it. Are you sure you can unlock a Jag?" Keller asked. "This guy owes me ten grand and he's sixty days behind in his payment. The word is that he's leaving town this morning."

"No sweat. I'm the superstar in Steal-A-Car, remember? If that guy leaves town, he'll be on a bus."

I hung up the receiver and did a one-foot hop to the bathroom. The iodine bottle was empty, but for two hundred bucks I could probably get a doctor to make a house-call. Instead, I poured bourbon over the foot, drank two cups of coffee, dressed and picked up my black bag. It was time to make my own house-call on a red Jaguar.

I backed up my Jack Wells, Investigations, career by picking up cars whose owners wanted to deadbeat the Keller Finance Company. Repossessing locked cars usually requires no more than carrying dozens of GM, Ford and Chrysler keys, but a foreign job takes more finesse.

My black bag contained a hypodermic syringe which, when loaded with a dentist's hydrocolloid mix, will take a perfect lock impression. All I have to do is shoot the flowing goo into the lock, insert a small corkscrew with which to gently remove it — take it back to my apartment and pour up the impression with molten metal.

Wait ten minutes, chill with tap water, separate the metal and scrape off its feathered edges. Finally I polish the end-product on a lathe in my kitchen and — presto — I have a key! Not your run-of-the-mill car key with a centered hole and printed number, but one that will unlock a door nevertheless.

My job with Keller requires art, finesse and five to ten in Joliet if I get caught. Usually it pays fifty bucks per car, but this morning was a specialty job. I parked my Mustang sixty feet away from the Jag. Dawn's early light was just breaking as I loaded the syringe and carefully inserted the needle into the Jag's locked door.

Looking at my watch and waiting the required minute, I hummed a tune from a thirty-year-old Lucky Strike *Hit Parade* while tossing a mental coin to decide whether to give the two hundred to my landlord or my bookie. The landlord won by two lengths — bookies seldom make you sleep in the street.

Thirty minutes later I had returned to my apartment, made the key and was back again at Eighteenth and Garner. Minutes later I was inside the Jag and had it hotwired. Driving down Eighteenth on the way back to Keller's lot, I glanced in the rear-vision mirror — an old habit formed from previous car-snitches. That's when I first noticed the guy in the back seat.

I swung the Jag's wheel to the right and turned off Eighteenth, giving it a Richard Petty steering performance until four fast blocks later when my passenger and I were snugly parked under the Addison Avenue viaduct. It was still only seven forty-five and the downtown office traffic wouldn't begin for at least an hour; so it seemed safe to inspect my cargo.

He was leaning against the armrest, hands in lap. His light tan jacket had two scorched holes just under the breast pocket. I gently unbuttoned the jacket and found the shirt front the same color as the Jag's upholstery — blood red. I eased the stiffening body into a reclining position on the back seat and closed the door. Then I went looking for the nearest phone booth.

The ceiling light was on and my head hurt like hell. I was on my back and struggling turtle-like to get my shell topside when a sharp object made contact with my rib cage. It was a shoe, and it belonged to one of two men who

stood over me like giants observing an ant colony.

I got up — slowly — and found the nearest chair, my skull pounding out Morse-code with each pulse beat. It had been a terrific morning. I couldn't wait for the afternoon to begin.

"You stupid jerk! Heisted a car with a body in it, didn't yuh? So now you wanna see his apartment. Well, take a good look dumb-ass!"

The voice belonged to the bulky goon in a pinstripe suit. He loomed over my chair, spreading garlic-scented carbon dioxide all over me. The smaller of the two hoods stepped to one of the windows, glancing at the traffic-flow that was now picking up on 18th below. He was young, black curly-headed and face marked by acne. His right hand held a .38 which probably explained the dent in my skull.

"Now that we're all in this together, my name's Jack Wells," I offered my new-found comrades. I gave it my best smile even though it hurt my scalp.

"We ain't in it all together, as you put it. And we know your name. You been out of it for ten minutes. Dino over there about bent the barrel on his piece on account of your thick skull," the pinstriped ape nodded toward Dino at the window.

"Gee, I'm really sorry. Hope it didn't hurt the gun."

"Keep your mouth open and

we'll find out if it still shoots," Dino told me. I tried relaxing in the chair. It was clear that these two were waiting for someone else to show up at Marzoni's apartment. That explained Dino's watching the traffic. I didn't have to be a wizard to figure that these two hoods had killed Marzoni.

"Mind telling me how you popped Marzoni without waking up the neighborhood?" I asked cheerfully. Dino sneered a lopsided smile and brought a silencer out of his pocket.

"Ever see one of these, Junior?"

"Shut up, kid. He don't need to know nothin'." The big guy glared at the younger punk.

"So what's the big deal, Al? He ain't goin' nowhere, is he?"

Al didn't answer, but suddenly I got a large lump in my gut. I hoped the guy they were waiting for was either a slow walker or sparred with Ali.

"What was Marzoni — a pusher, a seller or a buyer? Or was he moving into the wrong territory?" I asked Dino. He looked at Al before he answered me.

"Go ahead — tell him. You're the big-mouth around here. So answer him," Al replied. "And then after that, shut your yap and watch the street!"

"Cool it Al. I didn't mean nothin'," the kid whined.

"I said *answer* him!" The big

guy's voice had suddenly become low-pitched and dangerous. I could tell that Dino had somehow stepped over the line and knew it. He was beginning to sweat.

"Okay, Al. Whatever you say." Dino lowered his .38 and looked at me, hating himself for letting it go this far.

"Al's wife — she was runnin' away with Marzoni. So we killed him downstairs in the hallway and planted him in his car. When she comes up here I'm gonna waste her, too. It's what Al wants." Dino slipped the silencer onto the .38 and pointed it in my direction.

"Now can we get rid of this guy? Whatta we waitin' for?"

"Wait till I tell you to," Al told him and flipped off the light switch.

I wasn't exactly enthused over my situation. The 'slow walker' apartment called would be a woman. I hoped she was a black-belt karate expert who carried a machine gun for luck. Otherwise we would both be dead ducks.

I wondered if Al was packing any hardware. If I made a move against Dino it would sure as hell be good to know. Then the knock at the door stopped my planning. It was too late for anything complicated — I would have to play it by ear.

Al unlocked the door and stepped behind it while Dino went into a crouch beside the window. I was frozen to the chair.

"Vito, honey. You ready to go?

Why is the room so dark?"

Al grabbed her from behind, twisting her arms and shoving her roughly onto the couch.

"Goin' somewhere Baby?" he asked her. He turned on the lights again and the glare hurt my pain-ridden head. The woman was an olive-skinned brunette — young and pretty. She bounced off the couch like a rubber ball and stormed into her husband with both fists. I figured it had to be my move.

I slammed a right fist into Al's kidney region and left-handed the light switch. I heard Dino's silencer spat a tiny lisp followed by a groan. By then I had my arm around Al's thick neck and was back-walking him to the half-opened door. Dino was spraying the room with lead and I heard the little winged-messengers puffing into walls, hallway and Al's pin-striped suit.

Suddenly Al became dead weight under my armlock. I let him drop outside the door and pulled a hall fire-extinguisher loose from its base, foam-spraying Dino and his now-empty .38 until the apartment living room was a hoar-frosted white. Blinded by the foam, Dino walked right into my gut-punch started upward with floor-level velocity. He disappeared into a cloud of floor-foam.

I called the police, the county coroner and two ambulances. The scorecard read dead for Al, a

flesh-wound for his widow and an upset stomach in Dino's case. Then there was the corpse in the car that I had to explain. I left out the part where I had driven Marzoni around town, naturally.

Why give away the secrets of my trade? Al's widow backed up most of my story — grateful that she was alive and no doubt making plans to grab another Jag-owner. We wrapped up the taped testimony by early afternoon and I headed for the nearest bar.

After three straight J&Bs, I borrowed the Innkeeper's phone and dialed Keller's number. I wanted to make sure my two hundred clams were secure.

"Just wanted you to know that your Jag is safe and sound," I told him.

"Safe and sound where, you numbskull?"

"The police had to impound it, since that's where the body was found, but you'll get it in a couple of days. So I still get my two hundred, right?" I asked Keller.

"Wrong. That was for on-my-lot delivery, not a damn visit to the police. Hell, I wanted the car back today!"

"I offered it today, remember? And you told me to get lost because there was a corpse in the back seat. Pay up, Keller, or get yourself a new car-thief," I told him. I was getting funny looks from the bartender. Maybe it had to do with the words *corpse* and *thief*.

"For a guy who doesn't furnish Blue Cross and Blue Shield on his employees, you expect a helluva lot," I ranted.

"All right, all right. You get the two hundred. Just stay away from people with guns is all I ask. I don't need the publicity."

"You're all heart, Keller."

Leaning over the bar, I replaced the phone and exhaled a sigh of relief. Days like this I didn't need. Then I realized that the bar-joint was quiet as a tomb. Maybe I should explain what my conversation was really all about.

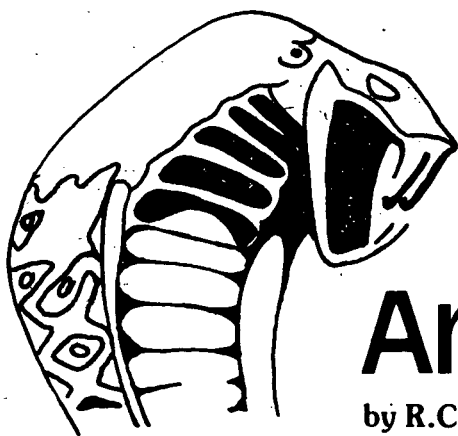
The bartender had a frozen look on his puss that was pure shock. The few patrons who had been

seated in the booths had quit talking. What the hell was going on? I pushed off the brass rail with my non-sore foot and twirled the padded bar stool around to have a better look.

I couldn't believe it. Three guys wearing ski-masks had been standing there, waiting for my phone-conversation to end. They all had shotguns. It was a bar holdup. I hoped Keller didn't read the newspaper tomorrow. It could read, *After corpse in car — Wells robbed in bar.*"

I pulled out my billfold and placed it on the bar, then twirled the stool around and poured my own drink. This one was on the house. ●





Annie

by R.C. TUTTLE

Annie was a beautiful female and a dutiful mother — one only another cobra could love.

SHE WAS A BEAUTIFUL reptile, seven feet long with a narrow, blue-green hood and a smile on her flat face. Not really a smile. King cobras can't smile. In fact, they are completely anti-social, indeed lethal, and Annie felt particularly anti-social at the moment. The enemy had put her to sleep and she had awakened to find herself in the chilly, dark interior of a box. Also, new life was stirring inside her sleek, svelte body.

The cover of the box was unlocked so with a powerful push of her head, she flipped the lid open and peered out suspiciously. The room about her was dimly lit and there were apparently lifeless objects nearby. She slithered out

of the box and coiled up on the cold floor.

Suddenly, there was movement. A large door swung open. Annie quickly made her way to a large potted plant in the corner of the room and hid in the foliage. Two objects entered and she watched, her body stiff, as the objects huddled next to a smaller-object. The few neurons that formed her brain couldn't translate the action but instinct told her that two of the objects were alive — and were her enemies.

Moments later, the objects left. Annie, after scanning the room, curled around the trunk of the plant and went to sleep.

Sergeant Quince Dorfman of

the Milwaukee Police Force walked into the zoo office, stood by the potted plant for an instant, then went over to the empty safe.

The stocky girl with short, black hair and oversized glasses glared at him. She had a round, boyish face and resembled some kind of a green bug in her zoo coveralls. She was pointing to an empty box. "Someone broke in here last night and stole Annie!"

Dorfman, tall, skinny, with a long, dour face and thinning grey hair, looked into the box, then knelt down and looked into the safe. He sighed. Now what? He suddenly had the odd feeling that this was going to be another of those weird cases. A few months ago, there was this stolen tarantula . . .

"Who or what is Annie?" he asked.

"She's our lovely King Cobra," the girl said. The girl blushed. "She's pregnant."

"Oh boy!" breathed Dorfman. "Miss, what's your name?" He pulled a blue noteblood out of his vest pocket then searched through his suit for a pencil, finally finding a stub in a coat pocket.

"Marie Greenspaw — Mrs. Marie Greenspaw," she answered crisply. "And you are Sergeant Dorfman. Sergeant, I want you to find Annie, and . . ." She glanced at the safe — "of course the rest of the missing stuff." She wagged a forefinger

at Dorfman. "You must find Annie. She is about to lay her eggs and I was going to take her home to my nice warm basement."

Dorfman smiled at her. "You must have a very very good natured husband."

"I hadn't planned to tell him about Annie," she admitted. She handed him a piece of paper. "Here's a list of what's missing from the safe."

Dorfman nodded, glanced briefly at the list then knelt to examine the safe, looking much like a college professor examining a priceless fossil. And the safe appeared to be something of a fossil. He put on a pair of rimless glasses and studied the lock. He nodded his head slowly.

"Yeah — that's it. Fats Watkins opened the safe and he probably had Heimie Jenkins helping." After twenty years on the police force, Dorfman had a headful of data on every known crook in Milwaukee.

"Fine," she said. "Now, go arrest them and tell them not to hurt Annie."

He shook his head slowly. "I don't think either one of them would touch a cobra." He shrugged. "They could have opened the box I suppose." He glanced at his watch. "Too late to start now. I'll get on it in the morning." He sniffed. "That coffee I smell?"

She sighed. "Yes, Sergeant. I have a pot going in the back

room. Come on."

They filed out in the direction of the coffee pot.

Annie had been watching the two with mixed emotions. They appeared to be enemies and the chill in the room was not to her liking. Somewhere in her primitive memory there was a warm jungle with tasty life for her to feed upon. She *had* to leave here.

She slid to the floor; sped along the edge of the wall and slithered through the partially open door. She saw a large object that reminded her of her cage and quickly made her way across the damp sidewalk.

The car window was partially open so she climbed in and curled up in some greasy rags under the driver's seat. It was warm so she went to sleep.

After having a hot cup of coffee, Dorfman drove home.

That night, Annie explored the garage and caught two mice for supper. She returned to the car and went to sleep again.

The next morning was a pleasant spring Tuesday and Dorfman drove over to Marty Finnigan's bar and grill, a rundown drinking establishment on the north side of the city. He arrived about nine-thirty, parked, pushed aside the CLOSED sign on the door and walked in.

The portly, bald-headed Marty was wiping off the bar with a dirty rag. Fats, a chubby little man with a head full of curly red

hair, a moonlike face and nervous fingers, was sitting at a table, sipping a beer and eating a sandwich. Heimie was at a corner buried in a newspaper.

Dorfman stood for a moment, contemplating the five nondescript tables, the decrepit looking bar and the ancient piano.

Heimie's narrow, swarthy face peered over the newspaper. "Hey! If it ain't old Dorf! Sneaking in for a morning beer maybe?" Heimie laughed. Known as the ferret in the peculiar world he lived in, Heimie actually resembled the furry rodent.

Marty sniffed. "You wanta beer, Dorfman," he growled, "you pay for it. Anyhow, the sign outside says closed."

Fats smiled amiably. "I'll buy the sergeant a beer."

Dorfman lit a cigar and regarded the three. "What were you guys doing last night?"

Marty shrugged. "I was tending bar. Wasn't I, fellows?"

The other two nodded.

Dorfman eyed Heimie. "How about you?"

Heimie studied his dirty fingernails for an instant. "Lessee . . . last night . . . Oh yeah — I was here until Marty closed around two in the morning. Then we played cards in the kitchen. Right, Marty?"

"Right," intoned Marty.

"Then," continued Heimie, "I went back to my room and watched TV."

Fats broke in. "I was with you. Remember?"

"That's right," Heimie said with an engaging grin. "We got a pizza and a bucket of suds."

Dorfman sighed. These three worked together on an alibi like the Packer backfield at their best. He eyed Heimie. "You live a couple of blocks from the zoo, don't you?"

"That's right," answered Heimie.

Fats cackled. "Heimie didn't want to get too far away from his home town."

Heimie eyed Fats coldly. "I remember them cracks, Fats." He turned back to Dorfman. "What's the beef?"

"The zoo office was robbed last night around nine o'clock," Dorfman said.

"Somebody steal an elephant?" Marty asked with a concerned look on his face. He waved his arms around. "Look for yourself. I ain't got it."

Fats frowned at Heimie. "I told you you shouldn't have swiped that lion."

"Shut up, Fats," snapped Heimie. "Dorfman, I don't know nothing about no zoo job."

Dorfman blew a puff of smoke toward the cracked ceiling. "There's a big king cobra missing, too."

Heimie and Fats looked at each other apprehensively. Then Heimie spoke in subdued tones. "Ain't that the reptile that can

wipe you out in thirty seconds?"

Dorfman nodded. "The same. Her name's Annie. You and Fats were seen at the zoo around seven last night by one of the guards."

Heimie took a quick deep breath. "Okay. Fats and I went over to see the baby tiger for a couple of minutes. Look Dorfman, you know damn well I wouldn't swipe a snake — where could you unload a snake? How come you always come to us when there's a ripoff in town?"

"Simple," Dorfman said. "You and Fats do the swiping and Marty does the fencing." He pointed the hot end of the cigar at Fats. "And there's one of the best safe-crackers in the Midwest."

"Come on, Dorf," said the glowing Fats. "Sure — I fool around with locks but it's just a hobby."

"And a profitable one, too," said Dorfman. "Besides Annie, there are some bonds and cash missing amounting to about ten thousand dollars. Why don't we all go down to the zoo and talk to Mrs. Greenspaw about the robbery."

"In your heap?" Heimie made a face.

Dorfman nodded. Get them to the scene of the crime. That was his approach.

The pleasant vibrations were starting again and it was getting warm. Annie couldn't count but instinct told her that there were

several live objects in the car — much too big to eat. But she was beginning to get angry and she was tempted to bite the nearest object. However, something was happening inside her body. Impending motherhood overcame her desire to lash out at the enemy.

Marty shuffled his feet in the front seat nervously while Fats and Marty smoked cigarettes in the rear.

Fats looked out the window at the passing scenery. "What are we gonna talk about at the zoo?"

"A busted safe," Dorfman said.

They rode on in silence while a miracle of nature was taking place at their feet.

Fifteen minutes later, Dorfman drove into the zoo parking space and parked next to the office. Mrs. Greenspaw, an imposing figure in her green coveralls, was standing by the door, contemplating the lovely spring morning.

She came down to the car and peered inside. "Well! Brought the robbers with you, I see. Did they hurt Annie?"

Dorfman laughed. "I don't think so. Can we go inside and —"

Mrs. Greenspaw shrieked. "Oh my gosh! You have Annie, too!" She pointed to the back seat.

Annie's beautiful, deadly head had appeared between Fats and Heimie.

The two men became frozen statues of horror, their eyes fixed

on the head waving back and forth between them.

Mrs. Greenspaw glared at them. "Don't you dare stamp on her. She's probably laying her eggs. I'll get the spray and put her to sleep as soon as she finishes."

She dashed off.

Dorfman found himself covered with a cold sweat. "That damn thing's been in the car all night," he breathed.

Fats had a glazed look in his eyes. "What we need," he said through tight lips, "is a goose."

"Mongoose, you mean," said Heimie, who was also making like a ventriloquist. "Dorfman, I'll get you for this."

"I'm gonna get out," Marty said.

"Better not," warned Dorfman. "She'll be right after you."

"And," said Heimie, "bite us on the way."

Dorfman eyed Heimie. "How about that robbery last night, Heimie?"

"Robbery! Lissen, Dorfman, I ain't —" He stopped in confusion as Annie stiffened suddenly and her unblinking stare beamed in on his ashen face.

"Know something?" mused Dorfman. "I think she saw you guys open the safe."

Annie switched her gaze to Fats, then back to Heimie.

Mrs. Greenspaw arrived with something that looked like a small Tommy gun.

"Hold it, Ma'am," he said. "Heimie and Fats want to tell me about the robbery last night."

She nodded and took aim at the head.

"This is police harassment!" tight-lipped Heimie. "I...

Annie stared him into silence. Her body was stiff, as though she were about to lash out at a mouse.

"Okay," breathed Heimie. "The stuff's under Marty's bar! Shoot, lady!"

She pulled the trigger and a white cloud filled the back seat. When it cleared, Fats and Heimie were sleeping peacefully.

Annie's head was lying limp on Heimie's lap.

Dorfman and Marty quickly got out of the car. Mrs. Greenspaw picked up the sleeping

Annie, dumped her into a box, then began collecting eggs.

Marty, his face covered with sweat, looked at Dorfman. "Look, Dorf, I don't know nothing about what's behind my bar. If them guys busted the safe, I don't know..." His face was a picture of innocence.

"Tell you what, Marty. Let's go back to your place, have a drink of your best whiskey and then we'll see what's behind the bar. Okay?"

Mrs. Greenspaw touched Dorfman's arm. "You should be honored, Sergeant, Annie picked your car for the birthplace of her family."

Dorfman looked at Marty. "We'll make that two drinks." ●



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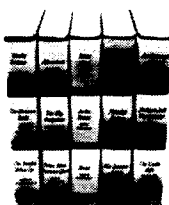
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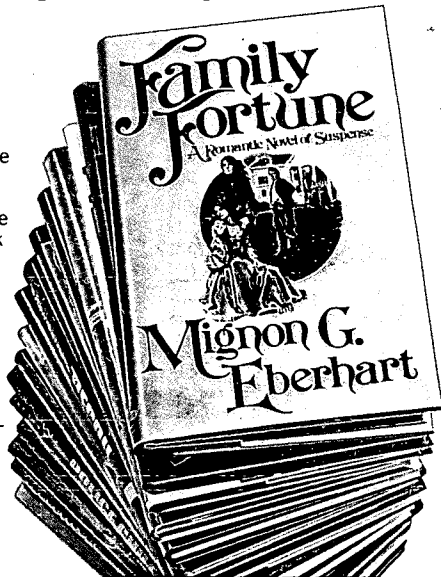
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